

# Baptism Essential to Salvation

by W.H. Hopson

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*Faith, repentance, and baptism are essential to salvation, as stated in the Savior's Amnesty Proclamation.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:12, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 7:12, James 2:17, 2 Peter 3:15

**Topics:** "Baptism And Salvation", "Faith And Repentance"

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## Description

W.H. Hopson preaches about the essentiality of faith, repentance, and baptism for salvation, emphasizing the need for full compliance with the conditions of pardon outlined in the New Testament. He highlights the importance of understanding the law of pardon as the only amnesty proclamation for sinners, stressing that salvation is dependent on faith, repentance, and baptism as equally essential requirements. Hopson addresses objections to baptism as a non-essential element, refuting the notion that prayer alone can replace baptism in the process of remission of sins. He urges believers to adhere to the clear commandments of Jesus without altering or diminishing the Word of God, emphasizing the significance of baptism as a positive institution ordained for the forgiveness of sins.

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## Transcript

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."--MARK XVI: 15, 16.

THINK that the subject selected for consideration in this sermon, should be fairly, faithfully, fully discussed. Hitherto, in my opinion, this has not been done. In the "Quarterly," "Harbinger," and in our other religious papers, every doctrine and practice peculiar to the Disciples of Christ is being subjected to the most thoughtful review. This is right. The pulpit also is engaged, equally with the press, in this thorough reconsideration of the issues between the Disciples and the opponents of "the truth as it is in Jesus." This existing spirit of honest, earnest, searching inquiry into the teaching of the Christ and the apostles on the subject of man's religious faith, obligation, and duty, as relates both to the saint and the sinner, is a most praiseworthy and hopeful condition of things. I propose, in this discourse, in harmony with this commendable spirit of re-investigation of the things pertaining to the spiritual interests of mankind, to contribute my aid, in this direction; and shall, therefore, call your attention to the consideration of one of the earlier, rather [279] than the later, issues of the current religious reformatory movement.

Aiming at no display of scholarship, carefully avoiding all criticism upon Greek particles, and making simply a plain argument, in plain English, to plain, common-sense people, I hope that the sermon will be

productive of good in determining the precise conditions precedent to the enjoyment of forgiveness on the part of the sinner against God.

In order to a proper appreciation of the argument on the part of the hearer, I deem a few preliminary explanatory statements of high importance. There must be, in the discussion of the thing before us, no dodging of the precise issue, no misunderstanding of terms, no confusion of speech. To this end, a satisfactory definition of the words used in forming the proposition is necessary, as well as a definite understanding of the extent to which the proposition reaches. Before this is done, let me direct your attention to the law of pardon, as given by the Savior to his apostles. The statement, as recorded in Matthew xxviii: 19, 20, relates more especially to the duties of the apostles as ambassadors of the Christ. This I shall designate the Apostolic Commission. It reads thus: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." This statement contains a declaration of the Son of God as to his supreme authority; a command to the apostles to teach, to baptize, and to teach "all things;" and a promise that he would be with them "alway, even unto the end of the world." The [280] statements, as recorded by Mark xvi: 15, 16, and by Luke xxiv: 46, 47, I shall unitize into the following: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believes, repents, and is baptized, shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." This form of the Divine utterance relates more especially to the duties of the sinner. It contains, it is true, a command to the apostles to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," but, it will be admitted, nevertheless, by all, that its main feature is a definite promise from the Savior, through the apostles, of salvation to the sinner, upon the sinner's believing, repenting, and being baptized. I would, then, designate this "The Savior's Amnesty Proclamation."

Salvation, in the proposition, is equivalent to pardon, remission of sins, or forgiveness of sins. "Essential" is that which is not only very important, but indispensably necessary. The proposition does not include those who have never heard the Gospel in heathen lands. It does not include infants or idiots, who, though they may live in a land of Bibles, where the Gospel is faithfully preached, are, by the consent of all, intellectually incompetent to believe or be baptized of their own free-will and accord. It does include all who hear. Hear, in Biblical currency, includes both the opportunity and the mental ability to comprehend the Gospel. Responsibility for the acceptance or rejection of the amnesty proclamation lies just here. Whatever, then, is declared in this proclamation to be a sinner's duty, in order to salvation or remission of sins, I hold to be essential to that end. In the proclamation, remission of sins is made to depend upon faith, repentance, and baptism as equally conditions precedent, and it is absolutely certain that no subsequent [281] declaration of the Savior or the apostles can be found, making a distinction as to their respective importance, and distributing them into essential and non-essential; but, on the contrary, it is certain that the last utterance of the Savior placed them in positive association with each other, and for the same purpose, and that the apostles, in their preaching under the commission, did, always and everywhere, in any fair understanding of their discourses, as reported in the Acts of Apostles, command their hearers to believe, repent, and be baptized, and that they never, in any address to sinners, or in any epistle to saints, gave the most distant intimation that any one of these three conditions could, under any circumstances, be dispensed with.

In the light, then, of the above facts, definitions, and restrictions, I affirm "that faith, repentance, and baptism are essential to salvation." The law of pardon, contained in the statement of the Savior to the

apostles on sending them into all the world to preach the Gospel, is, in its own simple utterances, so plain and easy of comprehension, that I am at a loss to conceive how a thoughtful mind could misapprehend its teachings. Faith and repentance are conceded by the Disciples, and by all Protestant sects, to be essential to the salvation of all who come within the provisions of the proclamation. We and they agree that "saved" or "damned" in the proclamation applies to those, and those only, who have an opportunity to hear the Gospel, and who, in years and in reason, have the ability to understand it--to accept or reject it. The issue between them and us in the preaching of the conditions of pardon, as we respectively understand the Savior to command and to promise, is confined to the question, "Is baptism essential to salvation?" We affirm that it is. [282] That the law of pardon enjoins on the sinner faith, repentance, and baptism, in order to remission of sins. That all this is required, and that nothing short of this will suffice. Permit me now to submit the proof, after the above lengthy, but necessary, introduction.

I. The law of pardon, as above given, is the first, the last, and the only amnesty proclamation in the New Testament offered to sinners by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Savior of sinners, and to whom belongs "all authority in heaven and upon the earth." We are therefore shut up to a compliance with its provisions as our only hope of pardon. And should any conflict, probable or real, between the provisions of this law and the antecedent statements of the Savior on the subject of remission be found (we admit none), even then such collision would, in no sense, invalidate the above conclusion; for it is a well-established rule in legislation, both human and divine, that the enactment of a law, by competent authority, necessarily annuls and makes void all previous existing laws at variance with it.

This rule, as applicable to the law of pardon enacted by the Savior, is most clearly substantiated by the very satisfactory utterance of the Apostle Paul in Hebrews vii: 12, "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change of the law." As the priesthood officiates almost exclusively with reference to an atonement and the remission of sins, the change in the law must be in reference to the same things. As, then, in the very necessity and philosophy of things, the last law repeals all laws previously made, not in harmony with it, it becomes, in this discussion, a matter of transcendent importance to ascertain the time when the above-mentioned law came into being and force.

If it be the last law on the subject, then [283] to it, and to it alone, must we look for the conditions of salvation. When was the commission given? Not in the lifetime of the Savior upon the earth, when he was a suffering, sorrowing sojourner among the sons of men; not in the valedictory address to his Disciples just before "his hour had come;" not amid the agonies of the Cross; but, after his death; after his resurrection; after he had been with the Apostles for forty days, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God," and "opening their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures,"--after all this, was the commission given.

When, then, is still the question. The exact time must be determined. Amid the solemn surroundings of the farewell scene, as the risen Savior turned to take the last fond look of the beloved twelve, who had been his companions and his pupils for nearly three years and a half; who, so oft, had sat at his feet and listened with a breathless silence and an enrapt attention to the words of eloquence and truth that fell from his lips of inspiration; and who, in wonder and astonishment, had witnessed the stupendous miracles performed by him in attestation that he was the Christ--then, precisely then--amid the crushing sorrow of that parting hour, just as he was about to ascend out of their sight through the clouds into heaven, to be coronated King of kings and Lord of lords--he said to them: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned."

II. What has just been shown to be the last law of pardon Jesus gave, is also the first one he ever gave as Lord of all, under the New Testament dispensation. Before his resurrection, the Savior himself tells us that he spoke and acted in obedience to the command of his Father. [284] "Lo, I come to do thy will," was his valedictory in leaving the heavens to come to earth; and "Know you not that I must be about my Father's business," is his first recorded declaration on the earth. Now the Crucified One is crowned King, clothed with supreme power, and the scepter of authority is passed over into his hand. Now, he makes laws in his own right as Sovereign of the heaven and the earth. The first exercise of authority under his reign as absolute monarch, was to enact the conditional amnesty above mentioned, and to commission the apostles to proclaim it to every creature, "among all nations, even unto the end of the world." This law, then, both the first and the last on the subject, is binding, in all its provisions, and as long as the Christian dispensation shall last.

III. This law is certainly the only one in the New Testament that offers pardon, on any terms, to a Gentile as such--the first one, perhaps, in the Bible, since the election of Abraham, and the selection of his posterity to be the children of God. Hitherto, a Gentile could only be in "covenant relationship" with God by becoming a Jew by adoption, through circumcision. The Savior, while a teacher on the earth, notwithstanding his great loving heart, confined his instruction to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." The Gentiles were never personally included, and, if he taught them or blessed them in performing upon them some miracle of healing, he did it under protest, saying: "It is not lawful to take the children's bread and give it unto dogs." When the Savior sent out the seventy and the twelve on their first mission, he positively restricted their preaching to the Jews. Their commission, as recorded in Matt. x, reads thus, so far as it pertains to the point before us: "Go not into the way of the [285] Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But now Jesus is King, and "the fullness of the time" for the coming in of the Gentiles has come, and the blessed Savior gives the apostles a new, and enlarged, and final commission: "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Go to Jerusalem, to Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth, and preach "the unsearchable riches of the Christ." Go wherever there is a mind to think, a heart to feel, a soul to save, and tell "the glad tidings of great joy to all people"--salvation from sin, its guilt and power, on the terms of this proclamation. Go, tell the people of every mountain and valley, every hill and dale, every continent and isle of the seas, of every tribe and tongue, that peace, pardon, and joy are offered to every baptized, penitent believer, through the atoning blood of the once crucified, but now coronated Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of sinners.

Dear friends, most, if not all of you, are Gentiles; and should you not rejoice that, at length, "God has granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life;" and as this is, beyond all doubt, the only law of pardon in which you have ever personally been included, is it not of paramount importance to you to embrace it? and will it not imperil your soul's salvation to neglect it, in whole or in part?

Thus far, in the investigation, we have found that the commission contains the first law of pardon enacted by the authority of the Christ; that it is the only one personally addressed to Gentile sinners; that it is the last law given by Divine authority on the subject of pardon, and, consequently, all previously existing ones are repealed; that its provisions, or terms, are faith, repentance, and baptism; and that this law, neither more nor less, is [286] to be proclaimed, in all time, among all nations, to every creature. It is evident, therefore, that the sinner's only hope of salvation, so far as obedience is necessary at all, is to be found in full compliance with the provisions of this enactment. Jesus is the only atoning lamb; and, as such, if we despise and neglect him, "there remaineth no other offering for sin;" so, is this the only law of pardon to

sinners, and, if they neglect and despise it, there remaineth no other law by which they can be saved; for of Jesus alone can it be truthfully said: "Thou hast the words of eternal life." May every sinner ponder well Peter's query: "To whom shall we go, if we leave thee?"

IV. The great commission contains the New Testament statutory law with reference to the pardon of rebel sinners. It is characteristic of statutory law that all its provisions are expressed, that none are implied; that to it nothing is to be added, from it nothing to be taken away; that to the enjoyment of any blessing promised therein, upon certain conditions, full compliance therewith is invariably required. Non-compliance with any one of them will work deprivation. For instance, the statutory law governing the elective franchise in some of the States of the American Union grants this political privilege to one who is "white, free, a male, a citizen, and twenty-one years of age."

The matter for thought is not, whether the law be good, bad, or indifferent. We might raise the questions: Have not women the right to vote as well as men? the negro as well as the white man? a boy at eighteen years of age as well as one of twenty-one? The simple question however, is, "What sayeth the law?" "Who has the right to vote? I answer: He, and he only, who has the five qualifications mentioned in the statute. Were they five times five, the argument would be the same.

This law, [287] when enacted, repeals all others inconsistent with it. It is absolutely binding, in its every provision, until it is itself repealed. The voter, under it, must have all the qualifications; the non-possession of any one of them will constitute disqualification. The subject of the law, having them all, can not be refused the privilege of voting; lacking one qualification, the privilege, according to the law, can not be allowed him, for the provisions are all equally essential.

The application is easy. The Savior, in his wisdom and goodness--and all his acts are both wise and good--has seen fit to suspend the forgiveness of the sinner upon the three conditions, Faith, Repentance, and Baptism. A full compliance is necessary to salvation, according to the statute governing the case. The willful neglect of a solitary condition will work deprivation of the blessing sought. These three conditions are in the law. The promise is made to depend upon full obedience to the three.

They equally possess the element of a condition precedent, and, in this sense, are equally essential. He, therefore, who willfully neglects compliance with any one of these simple and easy conditions, can not be saved. He who fully complies, is saved, if confidence can be placed in the declaratory promise of the Savior. Who dare doubt his word? who question his veracity? Let the sinner, then, joyfully accept the pardon on the offered terms. Let him tremble at the enormous wickedness of even the thought of "striking out" or "inserting" here.

"What God hath joined together let not man put asunder," though spoken in reference to marriage, is, nevertheless, an enactment applying to every Divine institution, so far as the sacredness of the tie is concerned. The last command of Jesus, given in person, was a command to the apostles to offer salvation to the [288] baptized penitent believer; his last command, by inspiration, is a command inhibiting us from "adding to, or taking from, the words of this book." He, then, that strikes out faith or baptism from this law of pardon, contemns the authority of Christ, and repudiates the last command he ever gave in person, and the last one he gave by the Holy Spirit; indeed, the very last Divine command given to man in the Bible. Can such a man be saved? If so, who need fear being lost?

V. In discussing the law of pardon, it is both pertinent and appropriate now to inquire, What is law--law itself? We have sound enough definitions of law as to physics, metaphysics, and ethics; but these do not

apply here. In human government, a law is defined to be a rule of human action. I accept this as correct, so far as it goes. But it is a definition informing us only of what law is as it relates to the party under law. What is it in reference to the Supreme power that ordains it? I answer, it is will. Law, written or spoken, is an expression of sovereign will. A rule of action, prescribed by legitimate authority, is a duty--an act due to the authority that rules and reigns. Law is, then, will, in the direction of the lawgiver; duty, as to the subject. This will, this duty, is expressed in a command, an enactment, or a law. A father commands his son, a master commands his servant, to do a certain thing; that command is law; that law expresses the will of the father or master, as the case may be, and the duty of the son or servant. The law of God is the will of God; to do his will, when he commands, is our duty. If he commands us to do any thing, he wills us to do that thing. If he commands us to refrain from a certain thing, he wills us to refrain. The New Testament doctrine or enactments is called "The perfect Law of Liberty." Perfect is that [289] to which nothing requisite is wanting. The New Testament reveals the whole will of God concerning us. Our every religious duty is laid down in it. In the revelation there is nothing wanting. To be a dutiful child of God one must do the will of God. In each and every command of God he finds that will expressed. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven." Does not the Savior command us to be baptized? Is not the giving of the command an unmistakable declaration of his will? Is not obedience to him our imperative duty? Baptism, then, is indispensably necessary to salvation. If not, then a man can be saved who refuses to obey the commandment of his Lord, who persistently and contemptuously neglects a known duty, who proudly slights and despises the clearly-expressed will of Jesus. The whole conduct and animus of such a man (acts, it is said, speak louder than words) is an emphatic utterance of--"Savior, not thy will, but mine be done." Such a man can not be saved; his heart is full of rebellion; "he is led captive by Satan at his own will;" "his sins are open beforehand, going to judgment." Argument, scriptural authority, the will of Jesus can not influence him. "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone."

VI. No law of pardon, enacted by Divine authority, in any religion, Patriarchal, Jewish, or Christian, can be found, which does not contain, as a constituent element, a positive institution. Baptism is the positive institution, which occupies this place, in the law of pardon, under the Christian dispensation, and the only one among the positive enactments of the Savior that can sustain this important relation. Positive law is, among Christians, [290] a stereotyped form of expression, including all commandments that relate to ceremonies, forms, ordinances, etc. Theologians distribute the law of God into positive and moral. A better distribution would be, soberness; duty to one's self; righteousness, duty to your fellow man; godliness, duty to God. But I accept the first, on account of its universality, and the familiarity of my readers with the thought. It is somewhat difficult to define and to distinguish these with exactness. I will do my best to make the difference prominent and perceptible. A moral law is intuitively right, right in itself--grows out of our relations to our fellow men; our obedience to it proves our love for each other; between it and its results there is eminent fitness, as of cause to effect.

Positive law is right, because it is an expression of the will of the authority that enacts it--grows out of our relation to God; between it and the end to be gained there is the absence of appreciable adaptedness; obedience to it is proof of our loyalty, and love of our reverence and respect for the lawgiver.

The non-essentiality of baptism to salvation is the outgrowth of the following infidel sentiment, common to the religious sects of the day: "If a man obeys the moral law, it is somewhat a matter of indifference whether the positive law is obeyed or not." I object to this. I most stoutly protest. It is absurd, it is false, it is wicked. A moral law is duty to our fellow man. Positive law is duty to God. Are we prepared, then, to admit

(and we must so admit if the above proposition be true), that in order to salvation, it is essential to discharge the duties growing out of our relations to man; but, it is indifferent as to our salvation, whether we do, or do not, comply with the obligations growing out of our relation to God? [291] As our relation to God is the higher relation, our duty to him is the higher duty. Adam in Eden was subjected to the operation of two laws. He was the husband of Eve, must love her, and, in proof, treat her kindly. But as creature, he was subordinate to the creator, God--must love and honor him, and, in proof, abstain from the prohibited fruit. He obeyed the moral law in spirit and in letter, but he disobeyed the positive law, knowingly and willfully. The result we know. "Original sin," that resulted in the expulsion of our first parents from their Edenic home, and from the presence of God, by which man was shorn of his glory, and which sin "brought death into the world, and all our woe," which led to the after-sorrow, sufferings and sacrifice of Jesus, was no more, no less, than an act of disobedience to a positive law, committed, too, by one whose obedience to the moral law was faultless and perfect. "To obey God rather than man," is the doctrine of both the Old Testament and the New. It is the duty of a man to do the whole will of God as far as "lieth in him"--his will, in moral obligations--his will, in positive enactments. He must obey God in both. But, if in the history of a human life, it should occur, that a man is commanded of God to perform a positive obedience, that directly conflicts with the moral law, instead of neglecting the positive, and complying with the moral, requirement, duty demands that he neglect the moral, and comply with the positive, enactment. We feel, in our hearts, that such an occurrence, in the Divine legislation, must be rare. Such instance did occur in the history of Abraham. "Thou shalt not kill" is a moral law, in strict harmony with all the definitions of it given above. "Take thy son, thine only son Isaac, and sacrifice him to me," etc., is a positive law. "God tried Abraham." Positive [292] institutions are tests of faith. God tries us by and through them. Shall we "be found wanting?" Abraham's trial was severe, but he "staggered not in unbelief." The will of God was his will. He obeyed, and became the friend of God, and the father of the faithful. They who, like him, are full of faith, will not speak slightly of the ordinances of the Lord, but will "walk in them, blameless."

The proof of our faith in Christ, and of our loyalty to him, is found in an honest, cheerful, willing obedience to his positive institutions. They are proofs of faith, because, seeing no fitness between the thing done and the blessing promised, the obedient man, of necessity, "walks by faith, not by sight;" and, from the same inability to appreciate adaptedness, it is a proof of loyalty, his only reason for obedience being: "The Lord commands; I love and honor him; I will gladly, joyfully please him in doing his will."

A man may obey God in every moral duty, (if such obedience be possible,) and give no proof by it to heaven or earth that he believes in God, or loves him. Who is it that loves God? Who is a Christian? We speak now of honest men, not of hypocrites. Select your best man in the Church, and test him by the moral law, and you will never find the proof sought. What can you say of him? He is an honest man; pays his debts; does not lie, nor steal, nor murder; does not blaspheme God, nor gamble, nor get drunk; is kind to his aged parents, to his wife, his children; is benevolent to the poor; visits the sick, etc.

Does that prove his faith in God? Can not all this be predicated of many men of your acquaintance who do not profess faith in Christ, or love to God? It, then, proves too much; therefore, it proves nothing at all. But when you say of a man, he was baptized, he prays, he [293] observes the Lord's day, he regularly celebrates the Lord's Supper, you have entered the region of proper proof. These are positive institutions, and God's own ordained tests of the faith, love, and loyalty of his people.

That, in all ages, they have been such tests, is easily shown from the Bible; and that parties were blessed or punished as they proved faithful or faithless when thus tested, is equally true. The throwing down of the walls of Jericho, by the blowing of ram's horns on the part of the people, and by marchings around the

walls; the healing of the Syrian leper, Naaman, by "dipping himself seven times in the Jordan;" and the cure of the blind man "by washing in Bethesda," is each a superlative proof of faith in these obedient parties.

To the sinner believing in Jesus, deeply convicted of his guilt, mourning over his sins, and truly repenting of them, baptism is ordained to be precisely such a test. How could the things done produce the above-mentioned results? How can baptism wash away sins? "Stagger not in unbelief. Walk by faith, not by sight." Adam lost Eden and the favor of God, Saul his kingdom, and Uzzah his life, in disobeying the positive laws of God. In obedience to one, Abraham became the friend of God; and Jesus, the second Adam, was acknowledged of the Father as "my well-beloved Son."

In conclusion, the truth seems to be this: We are commanded to live "soberly, righteously, and godly." This command is addressed to the Church, but applies to the sinner in principle. Godliness or righteousness, in their broader meaning, include the whole of our religious obligation. In their narrowest meaning, as here, they include singly but a part. Soberness (as eating, drinking, etc.,) consists of that class of duties whose operation is upon one's self. Righteousness--that class of [294] duties that affect our neighbor, as, "Thou shalt not lie, bear false-witness," etc.

Godliness--to those duties that grow alone out of our relation to God, baptism, Lord's Supper, etc. A man is sober because he loves and respects himself; he is righteous, because he loves and respects his neighbor; he is godly and is baptized, because he believes in the Christ, and loves and honors him, and would do whatever is well-pleasing to him. No man can prove to heaven or earth that he has faith in Christ, repentance toward God, or love to him in his heart, who knows that Jesus commands him to be baptized; that the command has not been repealed, and is, therefore, still binding; who stubbornly and willfully neglects it.

The sinner, like the Christian, must "show his faith by his works." His persistent neglect of baptism is rebellious resistance to the authority of the Savior. Such a man, with such a stubborn will and unloving heart, can not be saved.

I will now briefly notice some of the principal objections made to the design of baptism as advocated in this discourse.

"Admitting your argument, thus far, to be sound, and, in the main, I think it is, yet, in my judgment, prayer, and not baptism, is the positive institution ordained for remission of sins to the penitent believing sinner," says an objector. It is strange, with the New Testament before him, that any man should hold prayer to be the remitting ordinance to the sinner. It is a wide-spread error, and I deem it important to give it a thorough sifting.

1. In the commission--proven in this discourse to be the only law of pardon to sinners under the Christian dispensation--baptism is named among the conditions of pardon, prayer is not. It has also been shown that it is a great sin to add to or take from the Word of God." [295] Is it not, then, a "presumptuous sin" in a man, instead of preaching "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved," to strike out is "baptized," and insert "prays," preaching, that "He that believes and prays shall be saved?"

2. In the Acts of Apostles we have the only authentic record on earth of the apostolic preaching under the authorization of the commission. Their discourses, given only in part, are still full enough to teach us their understanding of the Savior's meaning in giving the law. As they were inspired expounders of the law,

their interpretation is infallible. Throughout their entire preaching, as recorded in the book of Acts, they did invariably command their hearers, composed of sinners, to be baptized, and in not one instance did they command them to pray.

3. We read, in this book, that "three thousand" were converted on the first day, "five thousand" the second, and afterward "great multitudes" are reported as being "added to the Lord," who daily "added to the Church the saved." No one will accuse me of exaggeration, when I state the number of the converted, reported as the result of the preaching from Jerusalem to Rome, at one hundred thousand souls. In the history of these numerous conversions, every one of them was commanded to be baptized, and not one commanded "to pray, or be prayed for;" and yet I must be gravely told that "baptism is a non-essential, and that prayer is the heaven-ordained condition of remission to the penitent believer."

4. In the history, also, it is found that the only man who was both commanded to pray, and who asked them to pray for him, was a baptized believer, Simon Magus. But, says the objector: "Was not Paul commanded to 'be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of [296] the Lord,' and is not 'calling on the name of the Lord' equivalent to prayer?" I reply: Saul had been very wicked; had denied and blasphemed the Christ; had been a great persecutor of his disciples; that it was the duty of all believers in the Christ to confess him with the mouth before men. The good confession was omitted in no case. In Saul's case it was pre-eminently a duty. "Calling on the name of the Lord," with him, was the recognition of the authority of Jesus, the confessing him to be the Christ.

But, grant that prayer is commanded in this instance, what of it? It does not invalidate baptism; it does not substitute prayer for it, as you assert, but simply associates prayer with the baptism. This extent hath the admission, no more. What does it teach, if prayer be meant? That the penitent believer is to be baptized, and wash away his sins, praying, at the time and in the very act of baptism, to the Lord, that, "in coming to his holy baptism," he "may receive the remission of sins." But the admission was made to show you that, being made, it will not avail you, as you thought. While, then, a sinner is not commanded to pray; while it is nowhere spoken of as a term of pardon to him; while it can not be regarded as his duty; still, an unpardoned man, going forward believingly, penitently, lovingly in the pathway of obedience that leads to forgiveness by the Divine promise, would, as the legitimate effect of his faith, his deep sorrow for sin, and conviction of his great guilt, offer up from his heart the silent prayer, if not with his lips the spoken one: "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner; and grant that, as my body is washed in water, my soul may be washed from sin in thine own blood." Such a prayer, at such a time, as the outgush of a believing, penitent soul, I do not object to. I rather like it. I think it beautiful and appropriate. But when [297] substituted for a Divine command; when these agonizing utterances of a human spirit under conviction of sin are relied on as terms of pardon--holding, as I do, the Divine authority pledged to that end--and when, as is always the case, the preacher and the mourning sinner are knowingly treating baptism with contempt, and regarding it as a non-essential, then, from the very depth of an honest heart, I loathe, I hate the doctrine and the practice, and my profoundest sympathies are stirred in behalf of the deluded mourners whose "blind guides" are leading them "into the ditch," and out of which, I fear, they will never come.

5. The truth is, baptism and prayer are positive institutions, ordained alike for remission of sins; baptism to the sinner, prayer to the Christian. To believers not in the Church, Peter says: "Repent, and be baptized for remission of sins." To the baptized believer, Simon the magician, who sinned in the Church, the same apostle said: "Repent and pray." Guided by the apostle, we can not err.

In final statement on the subject of prayer, I beg leave to say, that a sinner (by which is meant an unpardoned man, who has never been a member of the Church), as such, is nowhere commanded in the Bible to pray for the remission of his sins, or for any other purpose; and that every soul that was ever commanded or encouraged to pray, in the New Testament, by the Savior or the apostles, was at the time either a member of the Church of God under the Jewish dispensation, or of the Church of Christ under the Christian dispensation.

But says another objector: "In the commission, it is said that 'he that believeth not shall be damned;' and, if baptism is essential, it seems to me it ought to have read: 'He that believeth not, and is not baptized, shall be [298] damned.'" In your own mind, write out the commission, adding your amendment. Then salvation is left where we found it, dependent upon two conditions; but damnation, instead of being suspended on one act of disobedience, can now only be executed upon two acts of disobedience. Then, he could be damned if he believed not; now, he can not. Before he can be condemned under the improved commission, he must also be unbaptized. To be damned, he must be a non-believer, and unbaptized. A baptized unbeliever and an unbaptized believer, having obeyed one command and disobeyed the other, could, according to this commission, be neither saved nor damned.

You have altogether mistaken the value of the omission of baptism from the last clause of the commission. The meaning of the commission--in the light of itself, of the New Testament, and of common sense--is, that the believer shall have remission of sins in being baptized; but that the unbeliever will be damned, whether baptized or not baptized.

Dear hearer, we can not alter that law of pardon. Were we to attempt it, in some new translation, we would recoil at the unmitigated wickedness of the act. What we dare not print in a newly-published Bible we are getting out, it is both a bold and wicked act to teach. Let us try, for experiment's sake, to alter it. We will employ the word "not" as the chief element of alteration. We can alter it in several ways.

He that believeth, and is not baptized, shall be saved.

He that believeth not, and is baptized, shall be saved.

He that believeth, and is baptized, shall not be saved.

No lover of the blessed Jesus would consent to pervert God's holy word. Hence, no honest man could sanction any one of these alterations. Then let the commission [299] stand. Touch not a single part--mar not, by human addition, the fair proportions of the Savior's finished work. "Handle not the Word of God deceitfully;" "diminish not a word;" "declare the whole counsel of God." Let us preach the commission fully, faithfully, and forever.

"But will I be damned if I am not baptized?" Certainly. Why not? It is the blood of Christ that really washes away the guilt of sin. We come to the blood "into the death" of Christ, through faith and repentance, and in baptism. You believe and repent, but say baptism is a non-essential, and, therefore, will not obey it; that is, you will do nothing for the love of Jesus but just so much and no more as is necessary to "escape the damnation of hell." Why should you be damned if you do not believe, and not damned if you are not baptized?

Why is faith essential to salvation, and baptism not? Is faith essential? Yes. Why? Is there any intrinsic merit or saving efficacy in faith? None. Is Jesus under any obligation to you because you believe? No. Is

there any merit in faith and repentance combined? None. Add baptism, and is there any? None. The efficacy is in the grace of God, and the blood of Jesus. Of three things which equally are void of merit, how can two of them be essential, and the other not? Of three nonentities, can you make two entities, and have a nonentity left?

Of three nothings can you make two of them something, and the remaining one still nothing? Why is faith essential? Jesus suspends the pardon of the sinner on it. He commands him to believe, but he commands him to be baptized also; and he gave this command at the same time, under the same circumstances, in the same sentence, to be preached to the same people--for the same purpose as he gave the command to believe. If one is essential, [300] so is the other. If one is non-essential, so is the other.

The believer will be pardoned if he will be baptized. The baptized man will be pardoned if he be a believer. There can be no other meaning to the mandatory promise, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved." "Believe," here used in its broader meaning, includes repentance. The baptized, penitent believer, according to the Savior's promise, will receive the remission of sins. No other man will. I believe and teach that, according to the law of the Lord in the New Testament, a man must believe with all his heart in the Divine Redeemer; must deeply, sorrowfully, truly repent of his sins against God and the Christ, and must be baptized, in the name of the Lord Jesus, into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in order to the pardon of his past sins.

I further believe and teach, that no one will obtain an inheritance among the redeemed and sanctified in heaven who willfully neglects baptism, knowing it to be a commandment of the Lord Jesus. Is it not strange, passing strange, that the Protestant parties in the land consider the acknowledgment of the Trinity an essential element of an orthodox faith, and an essential qualification for admission into an orthodox Church; yet will treat as a matter of inferior moment (speaking of it as a non-essential) a commandment of Jesus the Christ, which is a clear revelation of his will concerning our duty, and the only one in all the Bible commanded to be done in or into the names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? But such is, nevertheless, the fact, and it furnishes an additional reason why we should "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." [301]

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