

## Compromising God's Plan of Salvation

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Jesus said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). These few words set forth the purpose of His coming from heaven to earth via the virgin birth (Matthew 1:21-23). The "seed promise" of Genesis 3:15 pointed to Christ as the Savior of the world. This is the same "Seed Promise" made to Abraham (Genesis 12:3). The promise was repeated to him in Genesis 22:18, echoed to Isaac (Genesis 26:4), and reiterated to Jacob (Genesis 28:14). This promise pointed to Jesus. Paul wrote, "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Galatians 3:8).

Jesus came to earth from heaven so man might go from earth to heaven for eternity. A part of the master plan of man's redemption is sometimes referred to as "The plan of Salvation." It focuses on what one must do to become a child of God. "It is finished" were some of the last words Jesus uttered on the cross. These words look to the perfect plan which God determined to implement for the redemption of mankind. It was not nationalistic, as was the law of Moses, but was universal in scope (Mark 16:15-16). This "plan" is simple and regardless of the society in which one might live, they can comply with it.

First of all, one must "hear" the gospel of Christ. Paul wrote "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:13-14). A person must then "believe" the gospel. Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). This faith leads one to "repent" of his sins (Acts 17:30) and confess with the mouth (Romans 10:9-10) that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 8:37).

The final step is baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 16:15-16; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 2:38). This act of immersion in water is essential to salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). However, it is of no greater significance than *hearing, faith, repentance, or confession*. Neither is it of lesser importance.

For all intents and purposes, the denominational world has been wrong on this subject from the beginning of their individual denominations. The various ideas the sectarian world hold relative to baptism for the remission of sins are manifold. However, they ultimately come to agreement that baptism is not essential to salvation.

It is on this point that many who claim to be New Testament Christians are guilty of dangerous and deceptive compromises. Let us look at some of the compromises that are presently being made.

Max Lucado of San Antonio, Texas is just one among many. He preaches for what was once called the Oak Hills church of Christ. They have recently removed the words "church of Christ" from their sign and are now recognized as "Oak Hills Church." Lucado is one of many who are guilty of compromising the plan of salvation as they strive to accommodate the denominations.

The July 2004 issue of the Christian Chronicle printed an interview with Lucado. Some of his responses are most interesting. For instance, in response to the question "What do you teach and believe regarding central beliefs such as baptism?" he responded:

I believe that baptism is essential for obedience. As far as I can tell there is no example of an unbaptized member of the New Testament church. In baptism the believer is identified with the righteous life of Jesus — buried with him, risen with him. Baptism is sacred. We've baptized over a hundred souls a year at Oak Hills for several years.

At the same time, I strongly resist any effort to trust the act of baptism to save. The work of salvation was finished when Christ said it was, on the cross. Baptism, nor any other work, adds to his completed service. My only contribution to my salvation is my own sin. The glory of redemption is not my baptism — but that a sinner like me could stand fearless and saved before a holy God.

Notice that Lucado said "baptism is essential for obedience," and then immediately adds "At the same time, I strongly resist any effort to trust the act of baptism to save." Based on those two assertions, he implies *obedience is not essential to salvation!*

We do not affirm that "baptism" alone saves. But it is a part of God's "Plan of Salvation." It is no more essential that faith, but it certainly is no less of a prerequisite. Jesus said "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). Peter said "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Lucado strongly resists "any effort to trust the act of baptism to save," while Jesus and Peter taught exactly opposite. They *did* teach that baptism saves!

He said, "Baptism, nor any other work, adds to his completed service. My only contribution to my salvation is my own sin." Here Lucado shows he has joined the denominations by referring to baptism as a "work." The claim however, is as false as can be. When the New Testament writers referred to the "one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5), they always (with one exception) used the passive voice. Now, *passive voice* signifies the subject as being acted upon, not actively participating in the action thus described. The one exception is Paul's reference to him baptizing Crispus and Gaius (1 Corinthians 1:14-15). It is evident he did the baptizing, but the two under consideration were *passive* in the act. Lucado's charge that baptism is a work is false to the core. It is denominational in origin and not in accord with the Bible.

In December, 1996, Lucado invited his radio listeners to pray the following prayer:

Father, I give my heart to you. I give you my sins, I give you my tears, I give you my fears, I give you my whole life. I accept the gift of your Son on the cross for my sins. And I ask you Father, to receive me as your child. Through Jesus I pray. Amen.

Following the prayer, Lucado remarked to those who might have prayed that prayer for the first time:

I want to encourage you to find a church, I want to encourage you to be baptized, I want to encourage you to read your Bible. But I don't want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved.

His views could not be more clearly defined. He encouraged his listeners to "be baptized...But I don't want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved" Clearly then, he does not view *baptism* as a part of God's Plan of Salvation.

The question was, "How is this vision of baptism different than how baptism has been used by our movement? Does accepting a Christian before baptism pose difficulties in teaching baptism? How does Oak Hills implement this?"<sup>1</sup> Lucado's answer reveals his denominational leanings. He said:

We have discovered that if we preach Jesus, baptism is not an issue. In the teaching position paper that we give to all prospective members we explain this: once a person admits sin and trusts Christ for salvation, a step must be taken to proclaim to heaven and earth that he/she is a follower of Christ. Baptism is that step. Baptism is the initial and immediate step of obedience and worship by one who has declared his/her faith to others. With the exception of the thief on the cross, Scripture provides us no example of an unbaptized heaven-bound soul.

The thief, however, is a wonderful exception. His conversion forces us to trust the work of Christ and not the work of baptism. Remarkable, isn't it, that the first one to accept the invitation of the crucified Christ has no creed, confirmation, christening or catechism? He never went to church, gave an offering, was never baptized. He said only one prayer. But that prayer is enough to remind us that though our doctrine be air-tight and dogma dead-center, in the end it is Christ who saves.

Does his baptism-less conversion minimize the role of baptism? Quite the contrary, it places it in proper perspective. We are the thief and deserve heaven no more than he. The very act of baptism, a passive plunge into the water, celebrates our utter reliance on our dear Savior.

Notice his words, "[O]nce a person admits sin and trusts Christ for salvation, a step must be taken to proclaim to heaven and earth that he/she is a follower of Christ. Baptism is that step." Thus, he views baptism in the same light the denominational world has regarded it for generations, that is, as a proclamation to the world the person *is* already a follower of Christ. The very doctrine which our forefathers in the faith have met and soundly defeated on the polemic platform is now openly and unashamedly contended by some who have compromised the Plan of Salvation.

Lucado continues: "Baptism is the initial and immediate step of obedience and worship by one who has declared his/her faith to others." Where in all of the Bible is it ever hinted that *baptism* is "worship"? If this is true, this is the only act of "worship" God ever commanded which is done only once! The fact is, it is not an act of worship, neither is it a proclamation to heaven and earth the person is now following Christ. Baptism is that final, consummating act which brings one into Christ. When one is baptized, this brings to fruition that "form of doctrine" (Romans 6:17) mentioned by Paul. In the very next verse, this great apostle affirmed "Being then made free from

sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Romans 6:18). He said they were "made free from sin" after baptism; Lucado says it is before baptism. Whom do you accept?

Next, relative to the thief on the cross, Lucado said "He never went to church, gave an offering, was never baptized. He said only one prayer." Such sophistry overwhelms one! Of course the thief never went to Church because the church was not existent at that time. If his reference to the thief never giving an offering was intended to have relevance to the Christian age, he sadly misses the mark and the argument is specious at best. Again, the same answer is here given: The Church had not been established at this time. The thief lived and died under the law of Moses. Therefore any obligation one has today (to become a Christian or to live in a Christ-like manner) has no application to the thief.

Lucado says "the thief...was never baptized." Would he be willing to stake his eternal destiny on this claim? I do know this, the thief said, "...Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Luke 23:42). This statement proves he knew something about what Jesus preached. Based on the fact the thief knew something about Jesus' message, It is possible (notice I said "possible") this man had been baptized with John's baptism, which means he was "baptized for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3).

However, regardless of whether he had submitted to John's baptism is not the question. Jesus had the power to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24). Whatever might have been the case, it has no bearing on what a man has to do today to be saved. This thief lived under a different law than man lives under today. But there is one thing proved by Lucado's argument: He will use any argument to attempt to prove a point, which cannot be sustained any other way, just like any other denominational preacher,

Another question arises based upon this interview: In what way does baptism celebrate "our utter reliance on our dear Savior"? According to Lucado, the person has already come to God and is a Christian. How can "baptism" celebrate "our utter reliance on our dear Savior"? This is another example of his denominational double-speak.

He wrote, "The water of baptism symbolizes God's grace. Just as water cleanses the body, so grace cleanses the soul"<sup>2</sup> Upon what principle of Biblical interpretation does he make this claim? Paul said "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Paul argues that as Christ was "raised up," we are raised up to walk in newness of life! Were they walking in "newness of life" prior to being "raised up"? If so, how could they be raised us to "walk in newness of life"?

Notice this thought, according to him: (1) A person is saved, thus already has enjoyed the *grace of God*, (2) That person should then be baptized to obey God, (3) The waters of this baptism symbolize that *grace* he has already enjoyed! Add to this the fact Lucado and his followers will receive those who have not been baptized and who *will not* be baptized – what about those individuals? Lucado and all those who make the same basic arguments need to answer one question: Is there any situation in which an unbaptized person be saved from past sins? We want

no fancy frills, no denominational double-talk, no changing the subject, no "talking around" the issue, just a simple "Yes" or "No."

We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8). However, *grace* refers to that which God has done to redeem mankind. Baptism does not symbolize God's grace. However, based upon the words of an inspired apostle, baptism is a part of that which symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:17-18).

### **MUST ONE UNDERSTAND THE *PURPOSE* OF BAPTISM?**

Another problem area is the affirmation by some that one does not have to understand the purpose of baptism to be scripturally baptized. This reasoning opens the gates of fellowship to any person who has been baptized. Their argument is, if one was baptized to "obey God," that person is a Christian and should be fellowshiped. The one question that verily shouts out to those so making this claim: Does one have to understand he is being baptized to "obey God"? If he does, then he has to understand why he is being baptized!

Jimmy Allen writes,

"...in personal evangelism, I believe in studying the verses which teach baptism's essentiality. When the study is finished, the one taught must decide if the immersion he has already experienced is biblical. If he is convinced he was baptized to obey the Lord, I do not insist that he go to the water again."<sup>3</sup>

We ask a simple question: If the purpose of one's baptism is unimportant, then why did Inspiration attribute a *purpose* to it? Peter said repentance and baptism was "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Saul of Tarsus was told to "...arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). The Master said "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 16:15-16). Why did not the above inspired men just tell people to be baptized "to obey God"?

Furthermore, if being baptized "to obey God" is sufficient, why were the "about twelve" men at Ephesus baptized again? (Acts 19:1-5). They had been baptized with John's baptism, which was "for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). It matters not the time of the effectiveness of John's baptism was long past: They were baptized to "obey God." Therefore, this false doctrine would have to affirm they were mistaken when they were baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5)!

Jesus said "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). The apostle to the Gentiles wrote, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). It is interesting both Jesus and Paul affirmed one must know the Truth. Does one really know the Truth when he does not understand the purpose of baptism? Is it possible for one to be taught incorrectly about baptism and then be baptized correctly? If so, then why would it not be possible for one to be taught incorrectly about the

purpose of the Lord's Supper and then partake of it correctly? Must we understand that it is "in memory of"? Can one accidentally partake of the Lord's Supper in an acceptably way?

Paul asserted there is "one faith" (Ephesians 4:5). It is the same "faith" to which a "great company of the priests" were obedient (Acts 6:7), which has been 'once and for all delivered" (Jude 3). There is not now nor will there ever be another. This one faith reveals God's plan to redeem man, which some are striving to change to correspond with their denominational leanings. Their desire is to change anything and everything once considered as a part of the "one faith." They will do everything possible to achieve their goal – even to "Compromising God's Plan of Salvation."

The Divine plan is simple: Hearing the gospel (Romans 10:17), believing the gospel (Mark 16:16), repenting of one's sins (Acts 17:30-31), confessing with the mouth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 8:37) and being baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). This Divine plan we cannot and we will not compromise! Even though liberals join hands and continue to move down the path of destruction, we will not be moved. *God's Plan of Salvation* has been revealed once and for all. Woe to the man who will change it (Galatians 1:6-9) by compromise or concession in any way.

### Endnotes

1. The person conducting the interview shows his own denominational bias in the question. Notice that he implies a person can be a Christian before being baptized. He asked, "Does accepting a Christian before baptism pose difficulties in teaching baptism?" The fact is, one cannot be a Christian before he/she is baptized.
2. Max Lucado, *He Did This Just for You*, (Nashville, TN; Word Pub., 2000), p. 50.
3. Jimmy Allen, *Re-Baptism?*, (West Monroe, LA: Howard Pub. Co., 1991) p. 4.