## The Gospel, Salvation & the Sinner (4)

by Harry Osborne

Over the past few weeks, we have examined what is involved in conversion as taught in the New Testament. Prior to His ascension, Jesus briefly outlined the blessings to the one converted and the actions to be taken in order to meet the conditions Christ gave for the salvation offered (Matt. 28:18-20, Mk. 16:15-16 and Lk. 24:46-47). The book of Acts shows us several examples of conversions exemplifying the principles taught by Jesus as applied in actual cases.

Basically, conversion has to do with the change from condemnation to salvation (Acts 26:18). That change is made possible by two parties working together -- the individual and the Lord. The Lord has provided the means for the salvation of everyone through His blood (1 Pet. 1:18-19; Heb. 2:9). However, one must respond to Christ in obedience to receive that gift of salvation (Rom. 6:17-18). Without the involvement of both parties, no conversion occurs.

The examples of conversion found in the book of Acts demonstrate people accepting the offer of salvation given by Christ through His gospel by obeying His will. Acts 8:26-40 presents one such case of conversion along a deserted road. An Ethiopian eunuch, possibly a Jewish proselyte, had been to Jerusalem to worship and was reading from Isaiah 53 on his way home.

A preacher by the name of Philip was instructed to go to that road and was then told to speak to the Ethiopian. Why? Because Jesus said that the first step in conversion was to hear the gospel. It did not begin with a still small voice in the night, a better felt than told feeling, or some other subjective experience. Conversion begins when one is taught the truth of God and is drawn by that message to respond based upon a will to react to that new information (Jn. 6:44-45).

When the Ethiopian said that he did not understand who was being spoken about in the reading (Isaiah 53), Philip took that passage, prophesying about the death of Jesus, as the starting point for his teaching. The record says, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35).

What does "preaching Jesus" involve? That question is answered in the next few verses:

Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him (Acts 8:36-38).

If Philip simply "preached Jesus" to the Ethiopian eunuch, how did he know that he should be baptized in water? The answer is obvious. If we preach Jesus as those in New Testament times did, we must preach the necessity of water baptism. Why? Because Jesus commanded water baptism as a condition for salvation (Mk. 16:16). It was Jesus who declared baptism is necessary for all who would be His disciples (Matt. 28:18-19).

Those who claim to "preach Jesus" and yet reject the necessity of water baptism are preaching a different message than Philip preached (Acts 8:12-13; 8:35-36). They are preaching a different message than Peter preached (1 Pet. 3:21; Acts 2:38, 41). They are preaching a different message than Paul heard to be converted (Acts 22:16). They are preaching a different message than Paul preached as an inspired apostle (Rom. 6:3-11; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:11-12). They are preaching a message foreign to the New Testament.

However, baptism was not the only thing preached when Philip "preached Jesus." When Philip said that the Ethiopian could be baptized if he believed "that Jesus Christ is the Son of God", the eunuch responded by saying that he did believe it. The Bible says that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Thus, when Philip preached Jesus, he must have identified Jesus as the divine Messiah -- the Christ of Old Testament promise and deity come in the flesh.

Preaching that does not affirm the deity of Jesus and identify Him as the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy is not the kind of preaching done in New Testament times. The modernists of our day want to teach that Jesus was a good man, but just a man. That message is not "preaching Jesus," but is pure blasphemy. Likewise, one who denies that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Christ is not preaching the true message of Jesus.

It is also noted in the context that the Ethiopian confessed that which he believed concerning Jesus. The New Testament teaches that confession of Christ is involved in the process of one coming "unto" salvation (Rom. 10:10). Jesus Himself had noted the necessity of confessing Him if we are to be accepted by our Lord (Matt. 10:32; Lk. 12:8).

Immediately after the Ethiopian heard the message preached by Philip and confessed his faith in Jesus, the eunuch obeyed the teaching of Jesus by being baptized. The Bible says,

So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:38-39).

Philip did not tell the Ethiopian that baptism was a non-essential act or one that he could fulfill at a later date. If ever a case existed to test the denominational theory that one may be saved at one point, then wait to be baptized until joined by others wanting to do the same, this would be the case. Why interrupt a journey in a desert place to be baptized without others present if the baptism could have waited until later? When one understands the Bible teaching cited earlier about the necessity of baptism ***for* the remission of sins**, the urgency is obvious. Without that comprehension of the purpose of baptism, the urgency shown in the Ethiopian's case is inexplicable.

It is also interesting to note that when Philip baptized the eunuch, he did not sprinkle a little water on him. They went down into the water and came up out of the water. Just as in the case of John's baptizing, there was "much water" needed to baptize as was done in New Testament times (Jn. 3:23). A few drops or possibly a cup full would suffice for many denominational people who practice sprinkling or pouring instead of Bible baptism. The Scripture teaches that baptism is a ***"burial"*** (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). Hence, New Testament baptism is immersion.

Once the Ethiopian had obeyed, he went on his way rejoicing. We also can go rejoicing in salvation if we will follow the pattern for conversion revealed in the word of God. Regardless of the different messages taught by men today, the gospel of Christ remains the one and only message bringing salvation through Christ to obedient believers.