Notes on Baptism to a Denominational Missionary

This was written in response to a Missionary that I have corresponded with, and the point that he has posed is that baptism is not necessary for salvation. The position he is maintaining is that one can pray for and receive salvation by asking Jesus to come into your heart. He believes that if you have repented you will be forgiven and then baptism becomes a means of showing your faith outwardly to the world. The scriptures clearly tell us this is not so. Here is my response to him:

"Only those souls who are "in Christ" will be saved on the Day of Judgement. This is a sad fact stated in the scriptures, but it is true. We must respond to God in the way that He has chosen for us to do so or we will not be reconciled to Him. I am basing that truth on **Romans 8:1** which clearly states that those "**in Christ**" are not condemned. This passage supports this truth as well as the fact that one must change one's lifestyle (i.e. repent) in order to stay "**in Christ**". Yes, conviction of sin and repentance must come before baptism or the baptism is meaningless, or to put it another way, if you don't think you need to be cleansed of sin then what good is baptism if that is what it does?

The question is though how does one get "**into Christ**"? **Galatians 3:27** and **Romans 6:3** both give us this answer in scripture clearly when they tell us that we are "**baptized into Christ**". So my assertion that prayer and repentance does not save us is clearly scriptural. You cannot and will not enter the kingdom of heaven outside of Christ. Jesus stated in **John 14:6 "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"**. We must be baptized **"into Christ"** in order to go through Him to be with the Father.

Baptism is what puts us into a cleansed state in order to have fellowship with God. God is so holy that sin cannot exist in His blessed presence. In order for us to become His children and to have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us we must be cleansed through the washing of baptism. This is mentioned by Paul in **Ephesians 5:26** when he says that the "**washing of water**" or baptism sanctifies and cleanses us. We must be cleansed of sin and sanctified "or set apart" as clean in order to have fellowship with God as His children. **Titus 3:5** states this as well when Paul talks about the "**washing of regeneration**" or baptism and that it saves us. So does **1 Peter 3:21**... where Peter tells us **"There is an antitype which now saves us - baptism..."**

Since Jesus' blood was "**shed for many for the remission of sins**" as we are told in **Matthew 26:28**, how does that blood effect remission of our sins? We are washed in it when we are baptized... that is the only way to become clean. If we take a look at **Revelation 7:13-17**... we see in the imagery conveyed by John that there are many people there who have on "**white robes**". We are told that their robes were made white by being "**washed in the blood of the Lamb**", meaning Jesus, our atoning sacrifice. How did their robes become white? Through obedience to the command to be baptized in which they were washed or cleansed of sin's eternal stain by Christ's shed blood. Baptism is essential to being cleansed... you are not cleansed... or sanctified without it.

Baptism is the new birth spoken of in **John 3:5** where Christ says, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"**. Notice Christ says that He wants us to really get this point when He says "**Most assuredly**"... meaning, "don't miss what I am saying... it is important." Since our Lord placed such emphasis on this point... what is this then... this being "born of water and the Spirit" and how does it happen? **Act 2:38** answers this clearly. Peter, being divinely inspired, spoke to the crowd at Pentecost and convicted them of their sins. In his response to their anguished cry as to what to do about it, he told them **"Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"**. Peter gave the clear answer to what Christ was talking about when He was speaking to Nicodemus in **John 3**. Compare these two scriptures: **John 3:5** "**born of water and the Spirit**"... and **Acts 2:38** "**baptized**" and "**given the gift of the Holy Spirit**". My friend, it does not get much plainer than this in any language.

Also notice in **Acts 2:38** that Peter did **NOT** say "Repent for the remission of sins and let every on of you be baptized"... no, Peter made it clear in his speaking the words given to him by the Holy Spirit that remission of sins comes with baptism. The Holy Spirit inspired the writer with the order of those words precisely the way He wanted to, and He placed the phrase "**for the remission of sins**" after the command of baptism, not repentance. The preponderance of scripture supports the assertion that baptism is for the remission of sins. You cannot be saved if your sins have not been remitted. Christ came to earth and died for this very reason… to remit sin in our lives, if we will follow His commands. If we take away baptism as a necessary condition for salvation then we take away and make meaningless the reason for which He died on the cross, and we deny ourselves the cleansing power of His blood.

In summation let me quote my dear brother Batsell Barrett Baxter from his commentary on the New Testament

Church entitled "**The Family of God**". There he states eloquently in his chapter on Salvation... "In the book of Acts there are eight major conversions" for our example... for us to draw from as to how to be saved, "given as models for all people of all time. In every case the gospel of Christ was preached, the people believed in their hearts, made known their faith in some manner and then were baptized for the forgiveness of sins. It is strange that the only **ONE** of these elements in salvation, which is mentioned in every example, is baptism. Even faith is not mentioned each time, though, of course we know that it must have been the foundation out of which obedience came in each case. Repentance is not mentioned every time; confession is not mentioned every time. Only baptism is mentioned in each of the eight cases." Here are the God given examples he brings to our attention at the end of the chapter on Salvation:

- Pentecost in **Acts 2:37-38**, and **Acts 2:40-41**...
- The Ethiopian Nobleman in **Acts 8:35-39**...
- Saul of Tarsus in **Acts 22:16**... Saul believed and had repented and had prayed and fasted for three days but was still not saved... remission of his sins was still not had... until he was baptized.
- Cornelius in **Acts chapters 10 and 11**...
- The Philippian Jailer in **Acts 16:30-34**.

Apart from the redeeming blood of Christ there is no salvation... **1 John 1:7**. Please hear me when I say that baptism is for the remission of sins and it is the way God has prescribed for us to come into contact with His Son's cleansing blood... remission of sins does not occur any other way. Remission of sins does not occur even through the most fervent and sincere prayer offered in all supplication. Prayers for forgiveness can certainly be offered up... but until one is obedient and is baptized into Christ, forgiveness is not obtained. Salvation cannot be had without the remission of sins that we receive with obedience to the command of baptism. The scriptures make this crystal clear. Baptism for the remission of sins is only a part of it... but it is surely the initial step, which puts us "**into Christ**". Without it we cannot be saved. However the same could be said of the grace that God freely gives, and the obedience of faith required by mankind. All three of these are necessary for salvation. You cannot omit any of them… you have to have all three.

Salvation is God's gift, but the gift must be appropriated by man's response through obedient faith. Obedient faith is referred to in the scriptures in **Acts 6:7**, in **Romans 1:5**, and in **Romans 16:26**, where the phrase "**obedient to the faith**" or "**obedience to the faith**" appears. In all of these instances the inspired writer is referring to faith which includes within itself obedience to God's will. We must obey God's salvation plan for mankind in order to be saved.

Grace makes salvation possible... obedient faith makes salvation actual. Grace is offered by God to man... obedient faith is required of man to access it. Obedient faith, or the actions that man has to take to access God's grace, includes repenting being baptized for the remission of sins. Baptism gives us remission of sins... it cleanses us and makes us a fit dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, which is given to us at baptism. It also allows God to add us to the church of Jesus Christ... the "ekklesia"... as we see in **Acts 2:47** where the inspired writer says **"And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved"**. The church or "ekklesia" is made up of those called out of the world to be separate. They are Christ's called out body of people as we see in **Romans 1:6**. Growing in the Spirit and bearing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives is what comes next. That is what keeps us in the grace of God.

It is my prayer that I have clearly stated what the Lord says, and that you will receive this missive as it is intended... the speaking of the truth in love. Let me know what you think my friend, and may the Lord bless you as you study what He says to us on this. All of this in my writing is not on my authority... it is on the Lord's."