

A Gift Is Still a Gift

By Bryan Gibson

The New Testament teaches that baptism is essential for salvation, that one must be baptized in order to be saved (**Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21**). Those who believe otherwise will sometimes make this argument: “If one *must* be baptized to be saved, then salvation is no longer a gift” (**Ephesians 2:8**). What we want to show in this article is that a gift is still a gift, even when conditions are given for receiving that gift.

The city of Jericho was a gift from God to the Israelites (**Joshua 6:2, 16**), but there were certain instructions they had to obey to receive this gift—marching around the city a certain number of times, blowing the horns, shouting, etc. (**Joshua 6:3-5**). The Israelites did obey God and He *gave* them the city, not because they earned it, but because they demonstrated their absolute faith in Him (**Hebrews 11:30**—note the emphasis on faith). Suppose the children of Israel had failed to obey God. Would God have given them the city? Obviously, the answer is no.

2 Kings 5 tells of a man named Naaman who was healed of his leprosy. His healing was clearly a gift from God. In reading the story, though, we see that Naaman had to follow certain instructions to be healed. He had to dip seven times in the Jordan River before he could receive this gift from God, and after some persuasion, that’s exactly what he did. Would anyone look at this event and say, “Look what Naaman did. He healed himself”? Clearly, his healing was still a gift from God—what Naaman did in no way robbed God of his glory.

The New Testament establishes the same principle. Notice the promise given in **Acts 2:38**: “Repent, and let every one 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.” As you can see, a gift is promised, the gift of the Holy Spirit, but only to those who would repent and be baptized. They had to do certain things to receive this gift from God.

Notice further the following verses from the **Book of Revelation**: “To him who overcomes, I will *give* to eat from the tree of life...” (**2:7**). “Be faithful until death, and I will *give* you the crown of life” (**2:10**). “To him who overcomes, I will *give* some of the hidden manna to eat” (**2:17**). “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will *give* power over the nations” (**2:26**). In all of these verses the Lord speaks of *giving* certain things to His people, but in each instance, conditions were attached.

So we should not be surprised at all when the Lord teaches us that there are certain things we must do to receive the gift of salvation. The New Testament teaches that we must first believe in Jesus as the Christ (**Mark 16:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9-10**). If we believe with all our heart, we will repent of our sins (**Acts 2:38; 3:19**); confess our faith in Christ (**Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37**); and be baptized in water (**Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:12-13; Acts 8:37-39; Acts 10:47-48; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27; 1 Peter 3:21**). When Naaman obeyed, God cleansed him of his leprosy; when you obey, God will cleanse you of your sins. What a wonderful GIFT!