

# God's Two Free Gifts

by David A. Huston

*This paper is presented as a response to those who say that water baptism and/or the gift of the Holy Spirit are not essential to salvation.*

*For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. Romans 5:6-9*

THIS PASSAGE REVEALS THE TWO GREAT PROBLEMS of every human being. First, we are all without strength. In other words, we are weak. Because of our frail human nature, we just don't have what it takes to live the way God expects us to live. Jeremiah 10:23 affirms that it is not in man to direct his steps. And because we are weak we are ungodly. That is, we just don't have the inward power to live a God-centered, God-pleasing life.

This leads to our second great problem. We are sinners. Whereas weakness pertains to our human constitution, sin pertains to our conduct —our thoughts, our words, and our actions. The Bible describes sin as a transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). Some may protest that they have not been so bad that they deserve the title sinner. But James 2:10 tells us that even if we keep the whole law of God yet stumble in just one point, we are guilty of it all.

So every one of us has two great problems: We are weak, and therefore we sin. Weakness pertains to our condition as human beings. Sin pertains to our actions as human beings. We sin because we are weak. And we are weak because we are human —we are not God.

Our weakness gives us a functional problem: we can't always do what we ought to do. But our sin gives us a legal problem: we are guilty in the divine court of God. Yet the weakness of our human nature does not excuse us. If we break God's law we are subject to God's penalty regardless of the reason. And Romans 6:23 says that the wages of sin is death. ”

In 1 Peter 4:17-18, the apostle warns that the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? Those who are the ungodly and the sinner are those who do not obey the gospel of God. What, indeed, will become of them?

Paul answers this question in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 where he writes, And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.... Who among us would want to suffer this penalty?

Thankfully God has provided a way of escape. Romans 5:6-8 says that while we were without strength, while we were ungodly, while we were sinners, a Man named Jesus died for us. Through His death on the cross, God has provided two great gifts that are designed to overcome our two great problems. Since our weakness is what led to our sinfulness, God deals first with our sin, then overcomes our weakness.

The problem sin creates for us is that we are subject to judgment. There is a legal penalty for sin. When we break God's law we must pay the penalty. Every sinner stands before God guilty as charged. What we need is justification. We need someone to declare us not guilty. We need someone to forgive us.

Romans 5:9 says that God provides justification by His blood. When a person does not have God's justification, he will try to justify himself. He will make excuses for himself. He will cover over his sins and try to explain them away. Proverb 28:13 says, He who covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy. God offers us something much better than self-justification. He offers us mercy, which takes the form of justification by His own blood.

At the Last Supper Jesus said, This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. Revelation 1:7 says that Jesus washes away our sins with His own blood. Through the blood of Jesus Christ our first great problem, our sin, can be dealt with and we can stand before God as pure and innocent as a new born babe.

But what about the second problem? In Acts 1:8, Jesus told His disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. The blood of Jesus is God's plan for dealing with our sins, but the Spirit of Jesus is His plan for

dealing with our weakness. By placing His own Spirit within us, God begins to work in us (or energize us) to will and to do the things that please Him (Philippians 2:13). The Bible says that those who live in accord with the Spirit will fulfill the righteous requirements of the law (Romans 8:4).

Those who do not have the power of God within them often try to overcome their weakness in one of two ways. The first way is, they deny their weakness and act as though they are capable and strong. They may even convince themselves that they *are* capable and strong. This is one form of self-justification. But it is pretending, it is phony. What God wants us to do is admit our weakness. As Paul declared, "When I am weak, then I am strong. "

The second way is this: they admit they are weak but seek to justify themselves in their weakness. They continue in their irresponsible behaviors by getting others to carry their responsibilities for them. Their desire is that other people would make up for their weaknesses. There are many things in life we all need help with, but there are also many things that God expects us to bear individually. Yet some people try to pass their personal responsibilities off on others rather than looking to God for strength.

God has two free gifts for every human being. He wants to give us the gift of forgiveness of sins to overcome the fact that we are sinners and face legal consequences for our sin. And He wants to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit to overcome our weakness and our inability to lead a godly life. I'm so glad He doesn't stop at forgiveness. I'm so glad He wants to do more than simply forgive our sins, but also wants to empower us to overcome our sins.

How does God deliver these wonderful gifts to us? Paul explains that it is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life " (Titus 3:5-7). The washing of regeneration pertains to God's solution for our sins. The renewing of the Holy Spirit pertains to His solution for our weakness. But how do we receive these two great gifts?

In Acts 2, Peter preached the gospel: the message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In verse 37, the people asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter could have said, "Obey the gospel, since the way we receive God's two free gifts is by obeying the gospel. That's why those who do not obey the gospel are described as ungodly and sinners. But Peter did not use the words, "Obey the gospel." Instead He told them *how* to obey the gospel. He said, "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 (Acts 2:38).

It is important to understand that the foundation for receiving both the gift of forgiveness of sins and the power of the Holy Spirit is repentance. What does it mean to repent? In a nutshell, it means to acknowledge the truth about yourself and turn to God for mercy. It means to admit you are a weak, ungodly, sinner and need salvation. It means to humble yourself before God and say, "Lord, I need your two free gifts and I will obey your gospel."

First John 5:8 says, "And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one. The Spirit, the water, and the blood represent God's witness of salvation. Notice what stands between the blood that provides forgiveness and the Spirit that provides empowerment. It is the water—specifically the water of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.

Why must baptism be in the name of Jesus? Because Acts 4:12 says there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. And because Colossians 3:17 says that whatever we do in word or deed, we should do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. And because Jesus Himself said in Luke 24:47 that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name."

There is power in the name of Jesus! There is forgiveness in the name of Jesus! Why be baptized in any other name? The apostle said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (NIV). This is the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit that God, in His mercy, has provided for us. Since there is no other way to receive God's two remarkable gifts, why not receive them both today!