

Let Scripture Speak

By: David Burruss

There are days when scrolling through Facebook or other social media platforms can be exhausting. As a preacher, my feed is naturally filled with Bible discussions, debates, articles, and videos. While I appreciate seeing people interested in spiritual things, much of it is tiresome, and if I am honest, a good deal of it is discouraging. After scrolling through enough disagreement, I understand completely why so many people feel confused about what the Bible actually teaches. There are countless voices, each claiming to represent what Scripture teaches, yet many arrive at very different conclusions.

Seeing those discussions often reminds me of my own experience. When I was younger and began reading the Bible seriously for myself, I noticed passages that didn't seem to match what I had always been taught. Wanting to understand, I asked a preacher about those differences. His answer has stayed with me for years: "You'll go crazy reading the Bible. Just do what we tell you, and you'll be okay."

Those words shook me. Instead of encouraging me to study God's Word, they discouraged it. For a time, I even questioned whether God was real. I share that not to stir up bitterness toward anyone, but because I suspect many readers have had a similar experience. Somewhere along the way, a sincere question was shut down instead of answered. When that happens often enough, people either stop asking questions altogether, or they begin asking better ones. Looking back, I am thankful I continued reading. The problem was never with Scripture. The problem was being told not to let Scripture speak for itself.

Perhaps one of the simplest questions we can ask is also one of the most challenging: If I had no denominational background, no church tradition, no family influence, and only the New Testament in front of me, what would I conclude God requires in response to the gospel? Not what my church teaches. Not what I grew up believing. Just the text, read honestly, with a willingness to follow it wherever it leads.

That question exposes something important about how people approach Scripture. Some come to the Bible asking, "What does the Bible say I must do to be saved?" Others come asking, "What do I already believe, and how do I explain these verses?" Those are not small differences. The first approach allows Scripture to shape our beliefs and determine the conclusion. The second has already reached a conclusion and is now looking for verses to defend it. Every one of us, no matter how sincere, must guard against that temptation. It is far easier to slip into than most people realize.

There is another pattern I have noticed. People often grab hold of one passage and hold onto it so tightly that they forget the others exist. John 3 emphasizes belief. Romans 10 speaks of confession. Acts 2 commands repentance and baptism. Mark 16:16 says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." In Acts 22:16, Ananias tells Saul, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Peter also writes, "There is also an antitype which now saves us, baptism" (1 Peter 3:21), before explaining that he is not speaking of the removal of dirt from the body, but of "the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

The challenge is not deciding which of these passages to believe. The challenge is allowing all of them to speak together without forcing them into a theological system that quietly explains away the verses that do not fit our conclusions. Scripture does not contradict itself because it has one divine Author. When we approach it with humility, we do not have to choose between these passages. We allow each one to contribute to the complete picture God has given.

When we read those passages together, another truth becomes clear. The New Testament is not describing different ways of being saved. It is describing our response to the gospel. God alone accomplished the work of salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We contributed nothing to that work, and we can never earn it. Yet the benefits of Christ's sacrifice are not received apart from faith-filled obedience. God calls us to respond to the gospel in the way He has revealed. We cannot create salvation, but we can either submit to God's gracious invitation or refuse it. The question is not whether God has done enough to save us. The question is whether we are willing to respond in the way He has revealed.

Baptism has become such a point of controversy in modern Christianity largely because of concerns about grace and works. Many Christians fear that if baptism is necessary, then salvation somehow becomes something we earn. Yet Scripture never presents baptism as a work that earns God's favor. Instead, it presents baptism as an act of obedient faith in which God Himself is at work. Paul describes those who are "buried with Him in baptism," and then says they are raised "through faith in the working of God" (Colossians 2:12). That distinction is important because the same pattern appears throughout Scripture.

Consider Naaman in 2 Kings 5. Elisha told him to dip seven times in the Jordan River to be cleansed of leprosy. Did the water itself possess some cleansing power? No, God cleansed him. But God also told him exactly how that cleansing would come, and Naaman's healing was tied to his willingness to obey. Had he refused to dip in the river, he would not have refused a meaningless ritual. He would have refused God.

The same principle appears with Noah. Hebrews 11:7 says that "by faith Noah, being divinely warned of God concerning things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household." The ark did not earn God's favor. Faith obeyed what God said, and God saved. That is the pattern throughout Scripture. Faith obeys. Grace saves. God sets the terms, and the terms He sets are not the same thing as merit.

It also helps to notice how the New Testament actually handles baptism, rather than how modern debates handle it. Read through Acts and notice what happens whenever people believe the gospel. At Pentecost they were baptized that very day. The Samaritans were baptized. The Ethiopian eunuch asked, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Saul was baptized. Cornelius was baptized. Lydia was baptized. The Philippian jailer was baptized in the middle of the night. The Corinthians believed and were baptized. The Ephesians were baptized as well.

Not one of these accounts shows anyone questioning whether baptism mattered. The arguments in Acts were about Jesus: who He was, whether He had risen, whether the gospel applied to Gentiles. Baptism itself was never treated as optional or as some later addition to the gospel. That does not make baptism greater than Christ. It simply means baptism is the response Christ Himself commanded, when He told His apostles to make disciples of all nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

This consistent pattern should not surprise us. Paul reminds us that there is "one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4-6). God has not revealed multiple responses to the gospel for us to choose from according to our preferences. He has revealed one, and our responsibility is not to reshape it, but to humbly submit to it.

None of this is meant to win an argument for its own sake. It is meant to encourage an honest examination of God's Word. There are sincere people holding different views on these questions, and sincerity matters, though sincerity alone has never been proof of truth. What matters more is whether we are willing to ask,

honestly and repeatedly, "Am I willing to believe everything God says, even when it challenges what I have always been taught?"

That was the spirit of the Bereans in Acts 17:11. Luke describes them as "more fair-minded" than others, because "they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." They did not reject Paul's teaching simply because it unsettled their assumptions, and they did not accept it blindly either. They opened the Scriptures and searched.

That is still the invitation today. Not to trust every teacher without question, and not to distrust the Bible because Christians disagree about it, but to open the Book for yourself and let it speak. The confusion so many people feel after scrolling through endless Christian debates rarely comes from Scripture being unclear. More often, it comes from reading our conclusions into the text instead of drawing our conclusions out of it. An open Bible, read with an honest and humble heart, will always lead us farther than another argument ever could. So open it, search it, and let Scripture speak.