

A Baptist Fable

By Curtis Pugh

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Let me tell you a Baptist fable. It has to do with the ideas of giving and receiving. It is not exclusively the property of the Baptists since many people of other persuasions also tell it, but it is extremely popular among most of the Baptist people. Let us begin with our fable as follows. There is something wonderful that happens to every person born upon this earth. At some moment during the months before the birth of each and every baby born in this world God sends an angel to that little unborn child. The angel talks to the child telling him or her about all the gifts that God has stored up in Heaven. The angel tells about the gift of music: both the ability to sing and the ability to play beautifully upon various instruments. He tells the unborn child about the artistic gifts of many sorts including painting, drawing, sculpting, etc. Athletic ability is mentioned as well as superior manual dexterity and coordination skills. The unborn child is informed about the great gifts of a superior intellect, physical beauty and great speaking ability. Along with the information about these various gifts the unborn baby is told about the benefits of each one. He or she is regaled with wonderful things such as popularity, prestige, wealth and high positions of power that come along with the various gifts. Then the unborn baby is told that he or she must make a decision as to what gift they want, if any. Often they are told that they must pray a special prayer and ask God to give them the gift they desire. Angels are kept quite busy carrying this message to every unborn child. God would not be fair, you know, if He did not give every person in the world an equal opportunity to make this decision and receive His gift: even the people who have never heard of Him. End of fable.

Do you really believe God sends His angels to make such offers to unborn infants? Of course you do not! The reality is this: some people are given very outstanding gifts. From birth they possess intellect and ability superior to others. We call them “gifted” because they have been endowed – they have been freely and naturally provided with a certain ability or abilities far above and beyond what people usually have. They did not earn this ability though they may have since birth improved it and developed it. Gifted persons did nothing to qualify for their gift or gifts. They did not reach out and take them. They did not ask for these gifts. They did not earn them. Neither did they receive them because they would make good use of them for

some use their gifts to do wicked things. Some gifted people never develop or make good use of their special abilities. We can say with certainty that gifted people received as a gift whatever special ability or abilities they may have. Such people as we have described are called gifted because God gave and they received this or that ability although they did nothing to receive it. Do you get the point? A gift is given: bestowed. It is received. The use of the word received does not imply in any way whatsoever that a gift must be requested. Neither does the word received imply in any way whatsoever any action on the part of the recipient. In plain and simple words you do not have to ask for a gift and you do not have to do anything to receive one. These words do not mean, for example, that your rich uncle must wait until you ask him in order to give you a million dollars. Neither do you have to do anything to receive it since he is able to leave it to you without your knowledge or involvement. On the other hand, if you are unable to go to him to get it he is able to bring it to you or in some other way see that you receive it. Are you getting the point?

So in the Bible when we read: **“Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many”** (Rom. 5:14-15). Notice that the above quotation compares and contrasts two things: the act of Adam and its results with the act of Jesus Christ and its results. All died spiritually because of Adam’s act of sin. Christ’s act of sacrifice has caused the “gift by grace” to abound to many – not to all, but to those for whom He died. Neither those affected by Adam’s act nor those affected by the act of Christ were actively involved in what was done. Would you please read that last sentence again! While all men were seminally and positionally in Adam, only some men are in Christ and this by Divine selection. Furthermore those men who are in Christ did not get there because of anything that they did. The Bible says: **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. To the praise of the glory of his**

grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:3-6). Notice these words: **“he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world”** and **“he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”** God did the choosing! God did the placing of persons in Christ! Being in Christ the Beloved is one of those **“spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”** (See Ephesians 1:3). Those thus blessed; those chosen in Christ; those accepted in the Beloved did not put themselves there. They are not there as a result of having made a choice or a decision or doing any other thing for this was determined **“before the foundation of the world.”** God did not send an angel and ask them if they wanted to be in the Beloved!

So then the Bible is clear: men and women are positionally either in Christ or not and this was determined before the world came into existence. What about repentance and faith? What about the godly sorrow that works repentance? The Bible says: **“And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed”** (Acts 13:48). Some people are ordained to eternal life! The Lord Jesus said: **“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”** (John 6:37). Some people were given by the Father to the Son! While no man or woman has the ability as natural persons to come to Christ, God works in those given to Christ drawing them to Him. We know this because the Lord Jesus said, **“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day”** (John 6:44). God’s chosen ones – lost men and women – are spiritually dead, but are made alive by the new birth. This new birth comes not as a result of man’s exercising his will or making a decision. We know this because God’s Word specifically tells us that those who receive Christ do so because they **“...were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”** (John 1:13).

Why is it then that many Baptists subscribe to the fable that God’s gift of the new birth is not a gift, but is rather an offer that requires an action? They are like the lying telemarketers who plague us telling us that there is a gift waiting for us. If they have a gift for us, why not just send it our way? Of course they require that you participate in a survey or purchase a service or whatever. What they offer is not a gift at all: it is rather a reward for doing something they want you to do. But we would ask of today’s Baptists: where do they find in the Bible that God offers His grace to all men? Does He offer it to those who never hear of Christ? Give me one verse which teaches such a thing! If God made such an offer it would only be

rejected and trodden underfoot by all who are not Christ's sheep. We know that God operates by grace in some people. We know that others are called "**reprobates**" (2 Corinthians 13:5) and these God passes by.

It is true that God "**...now commandeth all men every where to repent**" (Acts 17:30). He also commands "**be ye holy,**" in Leviticus 20:7. 1 Peter 1:15, 16 reiterates this as follows: "**But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written. Be ye holy; for I am holy.**" In Matthew 5:48 the Lord Jesus said, "**Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.**" We readily admit that most often the word "perfect" carries with it the idea of completeness rather than sinlessness. But here honesty demands that the word means sinlessness in this verse since we are exhorted to the kind of perfection possessed by the Father. The perfection here is "**even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.**" Does God command the impossible? We must answer yes!

But man's lack of ability to obey is not God's doing. Traffic laws are intended to produce safe driving, but it is possible for a driver to get into such a state as to be unable to comply with the commands of the laws. He can get drunk, high on dope or even be too exhausted to comply with the demands of the various traffic laws. He cannot blame the lawmakers for his condition. They are still right in what they have commanded drivers to do, are they not? So it is that God is right in commanding men to do what is right – even sinful men. The fact that man is unable in himself to obey God's commands – to be perfect to be holy and to repent and believe – is man's fault – not God's. For we being seminally and positionally in Adam are responsible for the inability – the awful condition in which we find ourselves. It seems clear that God's commands to be holy and to be perfect and to repent and to believe, etc., are designed to show us our helplessness and our hopelessness. In a word, they are designed to show us our need of a Savior. God shows the elect individual in this way that he is a sinner and unable to keep God's holy law. Thus God comes in grace regenerating His elect and thus enabling them to repent, believe and walk in newness of life.

But what happens in contemporary Baptist ranks? Having been repeatedly told this Baptist fable, the average person having been assured of his ability to do something and cause himself to be born again is full of self confidence. He hears average Baptist preaching and thinks that if he or she can produce by human effort the effects of regeneration (repentance, faith and a changed life) then they will be born

again by God. They actually think that there is something they can do to bring about their own spiritual birth. Generally it is not their fault. It is the teaching of their preachers that have brought this their hearers to believe this false gospel. Consider the absurdity of what they are thinking. Pardon the crudeness of my illustration but think with me, please. New born babies cry and drink and burp. If a doctor takes a dead baby and somehow forces it to drink and burp and forces air out of its lungs in order to make it cry does that mean that the baby is alive? No, of course not. And so it is with many Baptists. They think if a person does certain things – if he can be talked into admitting that he stole a cookie from his mother’s cookie jar or a crayon from another kid in kindergarten – he has confessed that he is a sinner. Whereupon he is told that such sins will keep him out of heaven and keep God’s blessings from falling upon him unless he tells God that he is sorry for his sins. Ah, and then the capstone: he is told if he will have enough faith to believe in Christ and reach out and “receive” i.e. take the offer of eternal life he will be saved. All he has to do is pray a prayer inviting Jesus into his heart or asking God to save him or whatever. Then he will probably be told that if he was sincere he is a child of God because God said in His Word. **“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”** (Rom. 10:13). (It does not matter that God did not say that sincerity is a requirement for calling upon the name of the Lord. But it must be a requirement for multitudes have prayed and invited Christ in and are evidently still lost. Such people must have not been sincere enough. They have equated sincerity in praying a onetime “sinners prayer” with calling upon the name of the Lord and the two are not the same. So they add to the Word of God by saying that those who pray the sinner’s prayer must be sincere. Then they guarantee salvation based upon a sincere act of a spiritually dead sinner!)

So just what is it that they have done? First of all they have based their whole scheme of salvation on the ability of man to come to Christ: an ability which does not exist. We quoted the following words of Christ above, but reinsert them here for emphasis: **“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day”** (John 6:44). Second: they have failed to understand the difference between a gift and an offer and have made God out to be a super-telemarketer with a gimmick: He will send eternal life as a reward for your cooperation – just do something. That is quite clearly teaching works for salvation and contrary to the Scripture. God’s Word says. **“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of**

works. lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Only a prejudiced mind can distort the meaning of those two verses. Third: they have reversed the cause and effect in the matter of salvation: the effects of being born again are godly sorrow, repentance, faith and newness of life. They believe that by producing things similar to the effects of the new birth they have brought it about. If they can persuade someone to “repent” and “believe” and “call” – by producing these effects of salvation or a reasonable facsimile of them, they think the new birth has come about. However. **“that which is born of the flesh is flesh,”** according to Christ in John 3:6. Is it any wonder then that Baptist churches are filled with worldlings who must be entertained with thrills and excitement to keep them coming and to keep them awake when they do come? A nearby Baptist pastor recently boasted “I am proud to be a part of the flock on the block that rocks.” And this in the part of the country referred to as the “buckle on the Bible-belt!” Other Baptist churches which may not resort to such thrilling entertainments as others do are kept busy berating their people and “preaching hard on sin” in order to keep their goat-members in line.

Merriam Webster Dictionary lists the first meaning of fable as “a fictitious narrative or statement.” In other words, a fable is not true. Neither is this Baptist fable whether told by them or by others. Can you see the difference between those who have been talked into doing certain things by promises of salvation and those who have been arrested by Christ on their “Damascus Road”? The apostle warned of such a time as ours with these words: **“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables”** (II Tim. 4:3-4). Paul did not say that people would be turned into fables but “unto” fables. People like fables. They are entertaining. Fables often make folk feel good about themselves. And what better feeling to a fleshly person can there be than to be told that he or she has the ability to be saved by doing something. Their pride can be kept intact after all: going forward is only a brief time of embarrassment and admitting that you stole that cookie and that crayon is not so very bad. There is no mention in the Baptist fable of how God saved either Paul on his way to Damascus, or old Job who cried out, **“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes”** (Job 42:5-6). Believing this Baptist fable is not the same as seeing God’s holiness and your own

sinfulness so that you abhor yourself. Only the Spirit of God operates graciously in men and women in such a way as to show them their awful sinfulness and the glorious Savior who, by the sacrifice of Himself, really did atone for sins. Do you have the evidences of the new birth? Or is your pitiful evidence only the fact that one time you did something?



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