

The "Not" in the Devil's Tale

by Dave Miller, Ph.D.

Someone coined the title of this article many years ago. They were referring, of course, to the incident recorded in Genesis chapter three where Satan coaxed Eve into eating the forbidden fruit by assuring her that if she were to do so, she would become like God (3:5). Though God had previously informed her through her husband that "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (2:17), Satan boldly disputed such a directive by inserting the word "not" in the very same statement: "You will **not** surely die" (3:4, emp. added). He took precisely the same sentence that God Himself had uttered, and simply inserted the three-letter word "not."

Contemplate the gall of Satan. Ponder the absolute audacity of the devil in his willingness to pervert the Word of God by the simple insertion of such a small, seemingly insignificant word. Yet that simple three-letter insertion into the sentence articulated by God completely reversed the truth of the matter. It made it appear as if the truth was the exact opposite of what God had actually said. It countermanded God's Word on the matter and set in its place a falsehood that was in diametric opposition to God's will.

Besides the devil, who would dare to do such a dastardly deed? Surely not those who claim to be Christians! Surely not preachers and teachers of the Bible! Surely, only those who deny the Bible, who reject it as uninspired and a mere concoction of humans, would so tamper with God's Word as to negate a positive, unambiguous declaration of Scripture. Yet God did warn that even from among Christians would arise those who would distort, deny, and push aside His instructions. Jesus Himself warned: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). Peter agreed: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies..." (2 Peter 2:1). John added his voice of caution: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Paul claimed that even from among church officials, some would rise up and speak misleading things (Acts 20:30).

In view of these forthright words of warning and anticipation, one cannot help but be utterly amazed, even shocked, that so many who claim to be Christian have rejected the God-ordained role of water baptism in His redemptive scheme. The "faith only" perspective that was expounded during the Protestant Reformation, and has since permeated Christendom, displaced water baptism from its divinely assigned position. Rather than being the line of demarcation between the sinner and the saint, as the New Testament everywhere affirms, baptism has been relegated to an after-the-fact symbol—a post-conversion "outward expression" of the forgiveness previously achieved at the point of faith.

Though many New Testament verses expound the proper role of water immersion as intended by God, thereby weaving a consistent and harmonious picture throughout inspired Writ (e.g., Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38,41; 8:12,13,16,36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15,33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:5; 5:26; Colossians 2:12; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22), one is sufficient to demonstrate the absurd lengths to which so many theologians have gone to discount the biblical treatment of baptism: 1 Peter 3:21. In this verse, Peter announced very simply: "The like figure whereunto even **baptism doth also now save us**" (KJV, emp. added). The ASV words it: "which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism." The NKJV has it: "There is also now an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism." The NASB words it: "And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you."

What have the majority of commentators, theologians, and church authorities done with this verse? They have danced, twisted, and turned in every direction to evade the unambiguous import of the verse. Since they previously embraced a false theory of salvation—i.e., salvation by "faith alone" without any further acts of obedience on the part of the believer—they have had to engage in hermeneutical gymnastics and exegetical hocus-pocus to avoid the force of these verses that pinpoint the place of water baptism. In short, they have been pressured into doing **precisely what Satan** did in his discourse with Eve. They have had to take a very straightforward, unmistakable statement by the apostle Peter and insert the same three-letter word that Satan himself inserted: "not." "Baptism doth also now **not** save us;" "There is also now an antitype which now does **not** save us, namely baptism;" "And corresponding to that, baptism now does **not** save you." The gall and unmitigated audacity that accompanies such tampering with Scripture will surely be shown in eternity to be no different from the ploy of Satan himself.

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