

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

# THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

OCTOBER 2018

## Two-Sided Coins

With any biblical subject, the *complete* teaching of God's Word must be studied. Religious error often results from seeing one "side of the coin" (i.e. *part* of the truth) while failing to see the complete truth.

Notice some "two-sided coins" of Scripture that demonstrate the need for examining the *full* picture on biblical subjects.

God's Grace & Man's Work: **Ephesians 2:8-9** teaches "*for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*"

No submission to works called for by the Law of Moses *or* the Law of Christ gives us reason to boast. No matter how many good works we do, if we have sinned even once (which we each have - **Rom. 3:23**), we face eternal death without God's grace (**Rom. 6:23**). Salvation is thus not *earned* by man's work (cf. **Titus 3:5**).

Yet, works *are* needed from us in order to be saved.

**Philippians 2:12** says "*So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*" Salvation is not "by grace alone" and/or "through faith alone." Works of faith, among other things, are necessary in order to be saved (cf. **Jas. 2:14-26**). Salvation requires **both** God's grace **and** man's work.

More generally, salvation requires **both** the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, **and** faith and obedience on our part.

God's Love & Righteous Judgment: God's choice to offer us salvation was motivated by love. He perfectly demonstrated love by sending His Son to die on the cross (**Rom. 5:8**). Because of His love, God *really will* send the righteous to heaven (**Matt. 25:46**).

Yet, God is also a perfectly just God who *really will* send those who do not obey Him to hell (**2 Thess. 1:5-9**).

The "*righteous judgment of God*" (**2 Thes. 1:5**) will not allow sin to be ignored, but the *love* of God allows sin to be forgiven when one submits to God's terms for forgiveness.

God's Providence & Man's Free Will: One way God demonstrates His love for mankind is through His providence.

What is generally meant by "God's providence" is Him working through non-miraculous means to carry out His purposes. He works through His Word (**Heb. 4:12**), but this is often not what is referred to when speaking of God's providence.

The "providence of God" is not a term used in Scripture, but the principle is taught.

For instance, the apostle Paul prayed for the Philippian brethren to grow in love, discernment, sincerity, and righteousness (**Phil. 1:9-11**).

Prayers such as these demonstrate an expectation that God works through His providence to help His children better serve Him. Trying to pinpoint every specific providential act of God is "chewing on God's end of the stick" (cf. **Deut. 29:29**), but the Scriptures do indicate that He is working.

While God does work through His providence, this does not mean that He *forces* anyone to do right. God has chosen to

create mankind with *free will*. God's preference is to help us draw near to Him, but man has "free will" and thus must *choose* to obey (cf. **Matt. 23:37**).

Satan's Viciousness & Man's Free Will: Another two-sided coin that is connected to free will is related to *Satan's* work.

The Holy Spirit commands "*Be sober and self-controlled. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*" (**1 Pet. 5:8**). Satan is vicious, and must not be taken lightly.

At the same time, we must not blame wrongdoing on Satan. He does not have the ability to *force* us to do anything (cf. **1 Cor. 10:13; Jas. 4:7**). His deceptive traps must be taken seriously, but they should not be used as an excuse for sinning.

While God *chooses not* to force us to do right, Satan *cannot* force us to do wrong.

What Baptism Is and Is Not: Yet another two-sided coin of Scripture involves what baptism does and does not do.

Many in the religious world teach that baptism is not necessary for salvation. God teaches otherwise.

Jews on the Day of Pentecost were told by the Lord's apostle, "*Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (**Acts 2:38**). Before becoming a Christian, Saul of Tarsus was told by Christ's messenger, Ananias, "*Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*" (**Acts 22:16**; cf. **Acts 9:11-16**). Baptism is necessary for one to get "*into Christ*" (**Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27**), and is thus necessary for salvation (**1 Pet. 3:21**).

While we must not de-emphasize the necessity placed by God on baptism, we must not make baptism out to be something that it is not.

For instance, God does not promise that baptism washes away current, unrepentant sin.

Notice that in **Acts 2:38**, the command "*Repent*" is connected to the forgiveness of sin, just as baptism is. If one is baptized but has no intention of submitting his or her life to God's will, he or she does not have assurance of salvation.

Baptism is not the "finish line," but rather the "starting point" in our life of service to Christ. Upon being baptized, we must steadfastly submit to Christ's doctrine revealed through His apostles (**Acts 2:42**). If we fail to do this, God teaches we can fall "*away from grace*" (**Gal. 5:4**). This means we can be saved at one time, but lose our salvation. It means that being "once in grace" does not assure we will be "always in grace." Baptism does not assure one will never fall from grace.

Many other two-sided coins are presented in Scripture, but these examples help us to see that we must look at the *totality* of what Scripture teaches on a subject to fully understand God's will.

It is easy to look only at one side of a coin, and "swing the pendulum" to one extreme, and then for some to respond by considering only the *other* side of the coin, and swinging the pendulum to the *other* extreme.

May we avoid this and instead approach the infallible Word of God with proper respect, viewing every side of each biblical "coin."

**-Michael Hickox**