

Lost Souls on Pentecost

Dub McClish

The first Pentecost Day after Jesus' ascension to Heaven found a throng in Jerusalem from "every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). Of that number, about 3,000 obeyed the apostolic message by confessing their faith, repenting, and being baptized to receive forgiveness of their sins (vv. 37-41).

Upon their doing so, our gracious God, through the death of His Son, "remitted" (i.e., forgave) their sins. These were pronounced "saved," and the Lord added them—and all others who have since obeyed those same commands—to His church (v. 47). If 3,000 were saved, likely a much larger number went away still lost in sin. We will do well to consider some of the bases upon which some remained lost.

- **"Belief is all it takes":** Apparently, many were "pricked in their heart," indicating their belief that Jesus is the Christ (vv. 36-37). Were those who turned away after being thus convicted among the saved? According to many, when they asked, "What shall we do?" Peter should have said, "Nothing, for you were forgiven and saved the moment you believed." However, he told them to repent and be baptized to be forgiven/saved (v. 38). Only those who obeyed were saved (vv. 41, 47), as is still the case.
- **"We can't earn our salvation through baptism":** The statement is correct regarding "earning" salvation, whether by baptism or by any other means, no human being can earn salvation. However, this statement represents a gross misconception of baptism in God's plan. Baptism is no more a "meritorious work" than is a confession of faith or repentance. These are acts of obedience to God leading to salvation, not acts of merit on our part that somehow place God in our debt. All who are saved will be saved through God's mercy, not by their righteousness. Nonetheless, our salvation is through "the washing of regeneration" (i.e., baptism) (Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). Those who rejected the commands to repent and be baptized went home lost in sin, as men who yet believe they will be/have been saved by mere intellectual belief.
- **"The answer is too dogmatic and exclusive."** To the Jews, Peter's words must have sounded like narrow-minded fanaticism. As then, so now: Truth is dogmatic and it excludes those who reject it—in the very nature of the case. Jesus' way was—and is—narrow and exclusive (Mat. 7:13-14). It included—and still includes—only those who receive it (John 12:48; Acts 2:41), excluding all others (Mat. 15:13).
- **"God is too good to send anyone to Hell."** This misstates the case, implying that God's goodness and His justice are incompatible (Rom. 11:22). Actually, God is too good **not** to sentence unforgiven sinners to Hell. He would deny His own nature if He allowed sin to go unpunished. Men invite their own damnation by rebelling against God (Acts 13:46).

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