

OBJECTIONS TO THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM ANSWERED

THE NEW TESTAMENT is plain enough in teaching and showing that baptism (immersion) is part of the "plan of salvation." Such Scriptures as Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:5; Galatians 3:27; Titus 3:5; and I Peter 3:20,21 make this very evident. If a person truly believes in Christ and is in a state of repentance, the blood of Christ, spiritually speaking, is applied in the submissive act of baptism to wash away his sins (Acts 2:38-40; 22:16; Colossians 2:11-13; Revelation 1:5), and he is promised the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32; Romans 8:9).

But not everyone believes that baptism is essential to salvation. "Faith only" is the outstanding doctrine of Protestantism, and some say that baptism is essential for obedience, but not for salvation. To maintain such a position there are many Scriptures a person must "get around." Consequently there are many arguments forthcoming.

In this article we wish to examine some of the chief objections to baptism being essential to salvation (consider them in the light of the Word of God). We trust the following will be helpful.

The Thief on the Cross

People who deny that baptism is necessary are always calling our attention to the thief on the cross (one of the two who were also crucified at the time Jesus was put to death). They correctly point out that Jesus said to one of these thieves, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Then they point out that the thief was not baptized. Evidently they think

they have found a loophole, and this proves that baptism is not essential.

First, let us notice, there is a very basic (even elementary) misunderstanding involved here. The matter of distinguishing between the Old and the New Testament is overlooked. The Old Testament was a "schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Galatians 3:24-27), and it lasted (was binding) until the death of Christ on the cross (Colossians 2:14). With that in mind, listen to Hebrews 9:15-17, "And for this cause he is the mediator of the *new testament*, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. *For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.*"

Beloved, do you get the picture? The New Testament (or covenant) is just exactly like a man making out his last will and testament. He draws up his will, but it cannot be enforced until he dies. As long as he is living he can change the will as he pleases and do as he likes with that which he has to bequest. But once he dies, the will legally is in force. This is true with the Lord Jesus Christ. Before his death, the New Testament was not in force (and the Old Testament was still binding). He could do as he pleased pertaining to that which he had to give, in this case forgiveness and eternal life. Thus, he promised the repentant thief

that he would be with him in paradise. But once the New Testament was sealed by his death, it had to be executed as he planned it and as his apostles declared it, they being his “official” witnesses (Acts 1:8,22; John 14:26). After the New Testament came in force (with his death and resurrection), the Lord Jesus Christ gave the great commission to his apostles, and said, “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...*” (Mark 16:16). The answer to the question of salvation must come from this side of the cross.

Also, please examine Luke 5:23,24. Some were accusing Jesus of blasphemy because in healing he forgave sins, only God having such authority. Our Lord answered them, “What reason ye in your hearts? Whether it is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that *the Son of man hath power (authority) upon earth to forgive sins.*” The Son of God (God in human form) had authority to forgive sins in any manner he chose while on earth (but, as we have pointed out, once his testament was sealed by his death, it had to be carried out as he left it, “even unto the end of the world”).

Finally, let us add, it would have been impossible at that time for the thief (even if he had had the opportunity) to have submitted to the baptism of the New Testament. Not only because of the fact that the New Testament was not in force, but listen to this. “Know ye not, that so many of us as are *buried with him by baptism* into death; that *like as Christ was raised up from the dead* by the glory of the Father, *even so* we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3,4). Now, we ask, how could the thief have been buried with Christ by baptism into his death (and resurrected with him) when Christ was still alive and had not been buried yet (let alone risen)? The baptism of the New Testament did not and could not yet apply.

As extended thought on the thief on the cross, let us consider what some call the “sinner’s prayer” found in the context of Luke 18:10-14. This involved the Pharisee and publican who went up into

the temple to pray. After the Pharisee had self-righteously prayed, “the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, *God be merciful to me a sinner.*” This publican’s prayer is commonly called the sinner’s prayer and is used as a model in telling sinners what to do to be saved (at the same time excluding the necessity of baptism). But, remember, this was during the time of the Old Testament (notice the mention of the temple). Pharisee and publican alike were Jews (and thus God’s Old Testament people, no one else being allowed in the temple). Therefore, the publican’s prayer would not be parallel to an alien sinner praying for salvation, but rather like a backslidden Christian seeking forgiveness. (Likewise, the thief on the cross, being in the land of the Jews, was very likely a renegade Jew—thus, his situation in no way being parallel to an alien sinner).

Baptism Is a Work

Others quote Ephesians 2:8,9, trying to sidetrack baptism by calling it a work, and salvation is “not of works, lest any man should boast.” Here is the full quotation. “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.”

Here we see the two “sides” of salvation—“For by *grace* are ye saved through *faith*.” The word *grace* means unmerited favor; here especially on the part of God toward man. We don’t deserve salvation, but God has made it available. So, everything associated with God may be summed up under *grace* (everything is in the context of grace). Then there is man’s side—“through *faith*.” Man’s whole relationship to God is based on faith. Faith is the mainspring of every action. The inspired writer didn’t say “faith only,” but he did say faith. This correctly sums up man’s side of his dealings with God.

Now the “rub” supposedly comes when it says, “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” This is applied by

those who deny baptism as they try to pinpoint it as a work.

Well, what is the answer to this objection to baptism?

The answer is rather simple (as truth usually is). There are two kinds of works mentioned in the New Testament Scriptures, (1) works of human merit and (2) works of faith. Works of human merit greatly characterized the Law of Moses. By this means no man had really been justified, according to the apostle Paul (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:23). The Law of Moses was very much like a firing squad. The wages of sin is death; all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; and the soul that sinneth, it shall die. There was no escape. Death awaited. But the kind of works taught as part of the New Testament are works of faith. We are justified by faith as the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sins, and we find it is an obedient faith. The New Testament knows nothing of the common denominational doctrine of "faith only." James in chapter 2 of his very practical epistle, having reference to works of faith, says that faith without works is dead. The only time the expression "faith only" is found in the New Testament is to deny the doctrine of *faith only*. Listen to James 2:24. "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and *not by faith only*."

Good works of human merit can never take away sin or undo the past (although works of faith are essential in being a real Christian). It is conceivable that a person could reform and live a good moral life above reproach, approaching above sin, then die and go to hell. His theretofore unforgiven sins would still be upon him. Good works of human merit cannot take away past sins. Only the blood of Christ can do this, "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Kind reader, how in the world can people who object to the necessity of baptism apply the "works" argument against it? Baptism is not a work of human merit or righteousness; it is a work of faith. We believe the exciting truths of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Then we identify our

belief in this by a personal death to sin, a burial and a resurrection in baptism. Listen to Colossians 2:12. "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the *faith of the operation of God*, who hath raised him from the dead." Study Romans chapter 6. Also, the apostle Peter wrote, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*" (I Peter 3:21). And, what about Titus 3:5? "*Not by works of righteousness* which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Spirit)." Acts 2:38 is a parallel Scripture to this. He tells us that baptism is not a work of righteousness.

In fact baptism is anything but a work of human righteousness, lest any man should boast. According to Acts 2:38 (22:16; Colossians 2:11,12), we are baptized for the remission of sins—to get our sins washed away. Does human works do this? No, only the blood of Jesus. So, baptism is not a work of man (human righteousness), but it is God at work as the merits of the blood of Christ are spiritually applied to the sinner then.

Praise be to His Name!

Believe and Be Saved

A pagan Philippian jailer cried out in Acts 16 to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (verse 31). People have told this writer this proved that "faith only" was all that is necessary to salvation, and that this verse excluded baptism. It really is strange how such people attempt to throw the Bible against itself.

We hereby point out that repentance is not included in the answer given the Philippian jailer either. Do these people who reject baptism believe that repentance is essential to salvation? Yes, for the most part they do, and this writer surely does! But repentance is not

mentioned in this verse. If we used this verse to exclude baptism, it would also exclude repentance. One must be consistent.

The truth of the matter is that no verse of Scripture can mean any less than what it says, but there can be more truth in the light of other Scriptures. Also, we must get the whole picture (as here). They were talking to an outright pagan, a heathen. He had to be first introduced to this person the Lord Jesus Christ; then they would take things up from there. The verses that follow Acts 16:31 are very revealing in this matter. Listen: "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. and he took them *the same hour of the night*, and washed their stripes, and *was baptized*, he and all his, *straightway*." Repentance is self-evident. And, yes, they got around to baptism. He was baptized the "same hour of the night" and "straightway." Baptism must have been important.

As you study the book of Acts you will find that some people were told to "believe," others to "repent and be baptized," while still another was told simply to be "baptized." What is the explanation of this? It is quite simple. They were at different "stages" in their conversion. It was needless to tell the man who already believed to believe. He was told to repent and be baptized. For the one who had repented, the command was not to repent, but to be baptized. It is very simple, isn't it?

Kind reader, the Bible is plain enough in presenting baptism as part of the Lord's "plan of salvation." There is not a single objection to the necessity of baptism which cannot be answered in the light of God's Word. The only thing left for the humble believer to do is to ac-

cept what the Bible says on the subject. After everything has been said, Acts 2:38 is still in the Bible (in the New Testament). Please; for your eternal well-being, listen. "Then Peter said unto them, *Repent and be baptized* everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the *remission of sins*, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Spirit)." He continued, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to *all that are afar off*, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (verse 39). This is for everyone who will ever become a Christian (and all become Christians in the same way). Then verse 40 reads, "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, *Save yourselves from this untoward (wicked) generation*." How could they save themselves? Not by works of human merit, but by simply responding to what Peter said, **BY REPENTING AND BEING BAPTIZED FOR THE REMISSION OF THEIR SINS!** Notice the exciting verse that follows: "Then *they that gladly received his word were baptized...*" (verse 41b).

Beloved, would you no longer object to what the Bible teaches on baptism, and likewise gladly receive the Word and be baptized like in the early New Testament times? You will be eternally glad that you did! —By James E. Gibbons



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