

Arguments Against Baptism Answered

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The New Testament's Teaching on Baptism

On the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, the apostle Peter preached the first gospel sermon in fact. In Ac. 2.37-41, Luke recorded the reaction of Peter's audience on that occasion:

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him. And with many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls.

Here is an important statement made about baptism, i.e., it was for the remission of sins. In many other New Testament passages, we find clear statements about its importance. For example, in Ac. 22.16, Ananias told Saul:

And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name.

In Rom. 6.3-4, Paul taught that baptism puts us into Christ and into His death:

Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through

the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.

In I Cor. 12.13, Paul affirmed that baptism puts us into the body of Christ (which is the church, Eph. 1.23, 24, Col. 1.18):

For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit.

In Gal. 3.26-27, Paul taught again that baptism puts us into Christ and makes us children of God by faith:

For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ.

In I Pet. 3.21, the apostle Peter affirmed that like as Noah and his household were saved by water, we are too:

...which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

These are the basic passages containing the New Testament's teaching about baptism. Sad to say, they are not universally accepted, even among those people who profess to be Christians.

Many People Today Do Not Accept This Teaching

Although the first time the gospel was preached, "they that received his word were baptized," many people today do not receive these words. For example, our Jehovah's Witness friends, in their official publications, say this about baptism:

Baptism Does Not Wash Away One's Sins. (*Make Sure of All Things*, Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, Brooklyn: Revised in 1957, p. 40.)

What, then does Christian baptism signify? It is not a washing away of one's sins. (*The Truth that Leads to Everlasting Life*, Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, 1968, p. 183.)

Likewise, our Baptist friends deny the Bible's teaching about the necessity of baptism. *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches* by Edward T. Hiscox, D.D. shows the position of many of them:

Baptism is not essential to salvation, for our churches utterly repudiate the dogma of "baptismal regeneration"; but it is essential to obedience since Christ has commanded it. (Edward T. Hiscox, D.D., *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1890, p. 21.)

It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism", and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act, constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that sense, "baptism was the door into the church." Now, it is different...(*Ibid.*, p. 22.)

These quotations could be multiplied from other denominational publications. Rather than look at them all, this chapter primarily examines the reasons many in the religious world today do not accept the plain teaching of the Bible on this obviously important subject.

Jesus Wasn't Baptized for the Remission of Sins and We Are To Follow His Example

We can agree with much within this argument. For example, we are to follow the example of Christ (I Jn. 2.6; I Cor. 11.1). We can also agree that Jesus was not baptized for the remission of His sins, for indeed He had no sin (Heb. 4.15). However, the fact He had no sin itself might show something different between His baptism and ours.

Why was Jesus baptized anyway? Do those who make this argument against baptism follow it consistently, and submit to baptism for the same reason Jesus did? In Jn. 1.29-34, John the Baptist told why he baptized Jesus:

On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, After me

cometh a man who is become before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing in water. And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize in water, he said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit. And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the son of God.

Indeed, the reason John baptized Jesus was not for the remission of His sins, but to enable God to show John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah He promised in the Old Testament! God had told John the Baptist that one day while he baptized people, the Spirit would descend on one of them in the form of a dove. When this happened, John would know he had baptized the Messiah.

Now, who do you know who ought to be baptized for the same reason Jesus was? Who has been baptized for the same reason Jesus was? Today, none of us follows the example of Jesus in being baptized so God can show we are the Messiah!

The Blood of Christ Remits Our Sins, Not Baptism

Without exception, everyone who reads these words, and who believes the Bible, accepts that the blood of Christ was shed for the remission of our sins. Before we discuss the relation of baptism to the remission of sins, let's ask ourselves why we universally agree Jesus' blood was shed for the remission of our sins? Wasn't it because the Lord Himself said in Mt. 26.28, "for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins"? Certainly, we can all accept this plain statement from the lips of our Lord Himself.

Why then can we not accept the words of his apostle Peter, when in Ac. 2.38, Peter used identically the same language in the Greek about baptism: "And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins"?

If we can't believe Peter in Ac. 2.38 when he said baptism was for the remission of sins, why would we believe Jesus when He used the

same words to say His blood was shed for the remission of sins? If on the other hand, we believe Jesus when He said His blood was shed for the remission of sins, why shouldn't we as well believe Peter when he used the same words to say baptism was for the remission of sins?

If someone should argue that “for” or “unto” means “because of” in Ac. 2.38, i.e., we are to be baptized because our sins have already been remitted, why would not identical language mean that Jesus shed His blood because our sins had already been remitted, and therefore the blood of Christ has nothing to do with the remission of sins? Surely, we can see that whatever purpose Jesus accomplished when He shed His blood, the same purpose is accomplished by the baptism of a penitent believer in the name of Jesus Christ. Interestingly, it is by no means unusual to meet denominational preachers who have had a smattering of exposure to the Greek language who insist the word translated “for” or “unto” means “because of” in Ac. 2.38. However, when pressed for a New Testament translation that so translates the word, they universally meet with failure. Denominational scholars generally will not sacrifice their scholarship in favor of their denominational doctrine.

Charles B. Williams, at one time Dean of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, said in his *Charles B. Williams Translation*:

Peter said to them, You must repent—and, as an expression of it, let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ—that you may have your sins forgiven; and then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... (Charles B. Williams, *The New Testament In the Language of the People*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1966.)

J. R. Mantey, Department of New Testament Interpretation, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois, said, in a quotation on the back cover of Williams' translation:

...It is the best translation of the New Testament in the English language.

Likewise, G. R. Beasley-Murray, Principal of Spurgeon's College in London, later Senior Professor at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, KY, wrote a modern classic, *Baptism in the New Testament*. He gives chapters which thoroughly discuss baptism in the Gospels, in

Acts, in Paul's writings, and in other apostolic writings. In his Introduction, Beasley-Murray said:

This book is intended to offer a Baptist contribution to the discussions on baptism that are taking place throughout the Christian world. But the indefinite article should be observed; the impression must not be given that my interpretations are characteristic of Baptist thought generally. At most it can be claimed that they represent a trend gaining momentum among Baptists in Europe. I have striven to interpret the evidence of the New Testament as a Christian scholar, rather than as a member of a particular Christian Confession. (G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962, pp. v-vi.)

From his chapter on baptism in Acts, Beasley-Murray said:

Consequently, baptism is regarded in Acts as the occasion and means of receiving the blessings conferred by the Lord of the Kingdom. Admittedly, this way of reading the evidence is not characteristic of our thinking, but the intention of the author is tolerably clear. (*Ibid.*, p. 102.)

Whatever the relationship between baptism and the gift of the Spirit elsewhere in Acts, there appears to be no doubt as to the intention of Acts 2.38; the penitent believer baptized in the name of Jesus Christ may expect to receive at once the Holy Spirit, even as he is assured of the immediate forgiveness of his sins. (*Ibid.*, p. 108.)

From his chapter on baptism in the apostolic writings, concerning Rom. 6.3-4, Beasley-Murray said:

We that are Baptists have largely ignored this aspect of Pauline teaching; even when we have heard it we have hesitated to accept, partly no doubt because of the one-sided emphasis it has often received but partly also because we have not known how to deal with it.

But misapplication of truth must never be permitted to make us insensitive to it. (*Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.)

Some concluding statements were:

In light of the foregoing exposition of the New Testament representations of baptism, the idea that baptism is a purely symbolic rite must be pronounced not alone unsatisfactory but out of harmony with the New Testament itself. Admittedly, such a judgment runs counter to the popular tradition of the Denomination to which the writer belongs...The extent and nature of the grace which the New Testament writers declare to be present in baptism is astonishing for any who come to the study freshly with an open mind...the “grace” available to man in baptism is said by the New Testament writers to include the following elements: forgiveness of sin, Acts 2.38 and cleansing from sins, Acts 22.16, II Cor. 6.11; union with Christ, Gal. 3.27, and particularly union with Him in his death and resurrection, Rom. 6.3ff, Col. 2.11f, with all that implies of release from sin’s power, as well as guilt, and the sharing of the risen life of the Redeemer, Rom. 6.1-11; participation in Christ’s sonship, Gal. 3.26f; consecration to God, I Cor. 6.11, hence membership in the Church, the Body of Christ, I Cor. 12.13, Gal. 3.27-29; possession of the Spirit, Acts 2.38, I Cor. 6.11, 12.13, and therefore the new life in the Spirit, i.e., regeneration, Tit. 3.5, Jn. 3.5; grace to live according to the will of God, Rom. 6.1ff, Col. 3.1ff; deliverance from the evil powers that rule this world, Col. 1.13; the inheritance of the Kingdom of God, Jn. 3.5, and the pledge of the resurrection of the body, Eph. 1.3f, 4.30. (*Ibid.*, pp. 263-264.)

Beasley-Murray stated his conclusions in a chapter entitled “Baptismal Reform and Church Relationships”:

First, there ought to be a greater endeavour to make baptism integral to *the Gospel*. It is taken as axiomatic amongst us [Baptists—SGD] that the proclamation of the Gospel consists of making the redemptive acts of God in Christ known and calling for faith in Christ as

the due response; baptism is then a proper subject for exposition in the enquirers' class, along with instruction as to the nature of the Church, of worship, of Christian obligation in the Church and to the world etc. Peter's response, however, to the cry of his conscience stricken hearers on the Day of Pentecost was not "Repent and believe", but "Repent and *be baptized*"! (Acts 2.38). Naturally faith was presumed in repentance, but Peter's answer told the Jews how to become Christians: faith and repentance are to be expressed in baptism, and *so* they are to come to the Lord. Baptism is here a part of the proclamation of Christ. In an Apostolic sermon it comes as its logical conclusion. An effort ought to be made to restore this note in our [Baptist—SGD] preaching. (*Ibid.*, p. 393.)

Thus, we believe the blood of Jesus was shed for the remission of sins, because the Bible says it. Likewise we believe baptism is for the remission of sins, because the same Bible says it in identically the same words.

Baptism Is a Work, and We're Not Saved by Works

Baptism is a work, or a thing done, and we're not saved by works of a distinct kind, that is, works of merit. We are impressed with what many people in the religious world have been exposed to in the way of false teaching about baptism, and why they're leery of believing that baptism has anything to do with man's salvation.

Our Roman Catholic friends believe baptism is a work of merit, i.e., the act itself merits salvation whether any faith exists behind the act or not. For example, the following quotations from several official Catholic publications show that baptism often is not an act of faith at all:

Valid reception does not require faith...Therefore, an unbeliever who so desires may be validly baptized even tho he have no faith. (Jone-Adelman, *Moral Theology*, p. 320, cited by O. C. Lambert, *Catholicism Against Itself, Vol. II*, Winfield, AL: O. C. Lambert, Publisher, 1966, pp. 218-222.)

Likewise, Catholic sources teach one need not even be conscious when he is baptized:

Baptize any person found unconscious and in a dying condition. (Ayrinhac, *Legislation on the Sacraments*, p. 32, cited by O. C. Lambert, *Ibid.*)

On baptizing infants, Catholics teach:

Many priests find this the least spiritualizing of all their works in the Church. The fact that the recipient of the sacrament is unconscious of what is being done, and often in consequences behaves in a manner not befitting the occasion, undoubtedly detracts from the solemnity of the rite. (Ward, *The Priestly Vocation*, p. 89, cited by O. C. Lambert, *Ibid.*)

Two of the most amazing statements showing Catholics don't view baptism as an act of faith, but a mere meritorious work, are the following:

A miscarried fetus or embryo, no matter how small, must always be baptized—absolutely if certainly alive, conditionally if doubtfully alive. (Gerald H. Fitz Gibbons, *Spiritual First Aid Procedures*, p. 3, cited by O. C. Lambert, *Ibid.*)

The general rule is, of course, that a child should not be baptized until fully born. But if there is a danger that the child will die of suffocation, or from some other cause before complete delivery, it should be baptized on the first available members. (Rumble, *Quizzes on Hospital Ethics*, p. 56, cited by O. C. Lambert, *Ibid.*)

These statements regarding baptism as a meritorious work not contingent on the faith of the subject are as repulsive to us as to the one who argues that since baptism is a work, it has nothing to do with our salvation. However, just because Roman Catholicism goes to one extreme about baptism, we shouldn't go to another extreme where we don't teach the truth about baptism either. The argument that works have nothing to do with salvation is just as false as the idea that meritorious works do.

For example, the statement that works have nothing to do with salvation is not just an argument against baptism, but also an argument against repentance, for it is a “thing done.” Likewise, confession is a work—not a meritorious one, but certainly “unto salvation” (Rom. 10.9-10). Similarly, faith itself is a work, for Jn. 6.28-29 says: “They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” Thus, if works have nothing to do with our salvation, then faith itself would have nothing to do with the salvation of a person!

The truth of the matter is, *God* works in baptism: Paul said in Col. 2.12, “having been buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye were raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” In the next verse Paul told about the work God does when we are baptized with this faith: “And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, I say, did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.” When we have “faith in the working of God,” rather than thinking baptism has nothing to do with our salvation or perhaps even being unconscious to the act, and are baptized, God forgives us our sins, and raises us up with Christ to walk in newness of life.

Paul Said Christ Didn't Send Him to Baptize, Therefore Baptism Must Not Be Essential to Our Salvation

People who take this position use I Cor. 1.11-17 to substantiate their view:

For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, lest any man should say that ye were baptized into my name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize; but to preach the gospel...

Rather than showing Paul didn't think baptism was very important, this passage demonstrates the essentiality of baptism. First, notice the context of these words. Corinth, a church wracked with nearly every conceivable problem, also had a problem with its attitude toward preachers.

In this very passage, Paul mentioned that he learned they were divided over the preacher who baptized them. In this context, Paul said he was glad he hadn't baptized any more of them than he had. This was *not because he didn't think baptism was important, but lest any man should say that he was baptized into Paul's name*. Indeed, Paul baptized a few of them while there. *Many were baptized* by other men, as Luke's account of Paul's work in Corinth in Ac. 18.8 shows: "And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." So *many* were baptized, yet because of the specific problem in Corinth, Paul was glad that he hadn't personally baptized more of them, lest an even greater number would be calling themselves after him.

About the structure of Paul's language in I Cor. 1.17, "For Christ sent me *not* to baptize *but* to preach the gospel," this is an excellent example of an *ellipsis*, a figure of speech where certain words not directly expressed are understood. Other scriptural examples illustrate how we are to interpret these words. For instance, in I Pet. 3.3, Peter said, "Whose adorning let it *not* be the outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or putting on apparel: *but* let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit." In this passage, which is similar in construction to I Cor. 1.17, Peter didn't forbid putting on apparel—surely women were to adorn themselves with clothing, but he placed the emphasis upon the women's inward adorning, the adorning of their spirit!

Similarly in Jn. 6.27, Jesus used this construction when he said "Work not for the food which perisheth, *but* for the food which abideth unto eternal life." Plainly, Jesus didn't prohibit working for physical food (Paul in II Thes. 3.10 said: "If any will not work, neither let him eat.") but He showed where we should place the *emphasis*, i.e., spiritual food should take precedence over physical food.

Likewise, when Paul said Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach, he didn't depreciate baptism. Christ merely showed where Paul should place the *emphasis*, i.e., upon preaching the word of God. When the apostles delivered the gospel, it was more important that they preach. At that time, not just anybody could teach the word of God, but

anybody could baptize! Thus, the apostles rightly emphasized their preaching over baptizing the believers themselves.

In addition, Luke in Ac. 18.8 said Crispus *believed*, whereas Paul said Crispus *was baptized* in his account in I Cor. 1.14. This merely shows that “belief” in the Bible included baptism. Crispus was a believer because he placed his confidence in Christ enough to obey Him—he believed in Christ enough to be baptized for the remission of his sins! Those who argue about Jesus’ teaching on baptism ought to have the same faith Crispus had!

In this passage Paul also taught two things must happen before one may call himself after another person. He said for one to call himself after Paul, (1) Paul would have to be crucified for the person, and (2) the person would have to be baptized in the name of Paul. That neither of these was true should prohibit the Corinthians from calling themselves after Paul. Consider carefully what Paul’s argument means positively: *for one to be called after Christ, two things must happen*: (1) Christ would have to die for the person, and (2) the person would have to be baptized in the name of Christ! Thus, the very passage so many people use to show that baptism is not essential proves true belief includes baptism (as it did in the case of Crispus) and for one to be called a “Christian,” he must be baptized in the name of Christ!

What About the Thief on the Cross? He Wasn’t Baptized, and Yet Jesus Said He Would Be with Him in Paradise

The case of the thief on the cross has to be the most often offered objection to the necessity of penitent believers being baptized in our time. People argue, “The thief on the cross wasn’t baptized, and yet Jesus said he would be with Him in paradise.” This argument deserves an honest and forthright reply.

First, *how do you know the thief on the cross wasn’t baptized? What makes you think he wasn’t?* Remember how John the Baptist preached and baptized in this region, and the gospels tell how he met with stupendous success (Mt. 3.1, 2, 5, 6; Lk. 3.7, 12):

And in those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand...Then went out unto him *Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round*

about the Jordan: and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan...

He said therefore to the *multitudes* that went out to be baptized of him...and there came also *publicans* to be baptized...

Suppose someone could make statements like this about the community where you live, i.e., *all the city* had gone out to be baptized, that *all the region around* your city had, that *multitudes* had, and *even the federal employees* had! Would you be dogmatic that a certain individual in your community had not been baptized?

Of course, no one knows for sure whether the thief on the cross was baptized by John's baptism. However, the success of John's preaching shows that those who assume the thief was not baptized have no basis to make this assumption.

Whether the thief on the cross was baptized in John's baptism, he was not baptized in the name of Jesus Christ! *Christ hadn't commanded anyone in the world to be baptized in His name* at the time Jesus was crucified. The thief on the cross was never commanded to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ! Not until fifty days later, when the gospel was first preached in fact on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, were believers told: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins." So the thief on the cross couldn't have been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ—*he wasn't commanded to!* Have you been commanded to?

Suppose that someone refuses to pay his income tax, and when confronted by a federal judge, argues he doesn't have to pay income tax because Abraham Lincoln didn't pay income tax. That judge will inform him the laws have changed somewhat since the times of Lincoln and now demand it.

Similarly, one might argue that he doesn't have to put money in parking meters because his great grandfather didn't. He, too, will be informed the laws have changed since great-granddad's day. We are to obey the laws we live under, not the laws someone else lived under.

Likewise, the thief on the cross lived under the law of Moses. He was not under the covenant you and I are subject to, for Christ's covenant didn't go into effect until He died (Heb. 9.16-17). The thief never heard the words Christ directs to believers today: "Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Conclusion

When all men's arguments fall, the Bible's teaching on this subject is still the same: Ac. 2.38 still teaches baptism is for the remission of sins; Ac. 22.16 still teaches baptism washes away sins. Mk. 16.16 still teaches "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." I Cor. 12.13 still teaches baptism puts us into the body of Christ. Gal. 3.27 still teaches baptism puts us into Christ; Rom. 6.3-4 still teaches baptism puts us into the death of Christ; Col. 2.12-13 still teaches that through baptism we obtain the newness of life. I Pet. 3.21 still teaches that baptism saves us.

The first time the gospel was preached, "They then that received his word were baptized," (Ac. 2.41). People today who receive the gospel do the same thing. Friend, if you believe in Jesus Christ, and have repented, i.e., determined that you will live according to His teaching, won't you confess His name before men and be baptized for the reasons *He* said while you have opportunity?

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