

Objections to the Necessity of Baptism

By *John R. Gibson*

Introduction:

- 1) While I am convinced baptism is essential to salvation, many teach baptism as a good yet unnecessary thing, at least for salvation.
- 2) Many teach salvation by faith only, including most Protestant churches and most of the widely known preachers on TV and internet.
- 3) While a recent lesson focused on the positive side of baptism (10/13/19), today I would like to look at some of the arguments made against the necessity of baptism. (Most are from James Merritt, past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, in a religious debate I attended in 1989. These arguments are representative of mainline thinking.)

I. SAVED BY FAITH ALONE.

A. Protestant Argument.

1. “Acts 16:31 and Jn. 3:16 say it all.”

B. Understanding Saving Faith.

1. To deny that faith saves is to reject the Bible, but what kind of faith saves? Js. 2:14-26
2. Faith that those who seek God will be rewarded. Heb. 11:6
3. Rom. 5:1 is used as a proof-text, but notice Rom. 6:17-18.
 - a. Justified by faith and set free from sin when obeyed from the heart.
 - b. Paul didn't say two different things—saving faith is obedient.
 - c. Js. 2; Heb. 11:6; Rom. 6:17-18 do not tell us what acts of obedience are required, but do define saving faith as obedient faith.
 - d. Faith is vital and at times stands by metonymy for all one is to do, but the Bible is clear that more is required. Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:21, 37-38; 22:16; 16:31-34

C. What of the “Only Faith” Passages?

1. While some passages do only mention faith (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:1; et al), it is significant that when *faith only* is mentioned it is condemned in Js. 2.
2. Some passages do not even mention faith. What are we to make of these passages? Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21; 2 Pet. 3:9
3. *Only faith* passages don't teach faith only; nor do *only baptism* or *only repentance* passages teach salvation by repentance only or baptism only.
4. Truth is obtained by getting the whole picture. See sermon from 9/22/19 when we explored the greater context of Jn. 3:16.

II. THE THIEF ON THE CROSS.

A. The Faith Only Argument. Lk. 23:39-43.

1. Some tie that incident in with Rom. 10:13.

- B. The Thief Did Not Call on the Name of the Lord “Properly.”
1. He didn’t believe and confess Jesus as raised from the dead. Rom.10:9-13
 2. To understand Rom. 10 we look to Acts 2:21, 36-41; 22:16.
- C. Other Objections.
1. One can’t know the thief had not been baptized. Mk. 1:4f
 2. Jesus personally forgave the man’s sins. Lk. 5:24
 3. Baptism in Jesus’ name is a NT ordinance. Heb. 9:15-17
 4. Since we today don’t live prior to the institution of the new covenant and don’t have the privilege of being personally forgiven by Jesus, we must repent and be baptized.

III. “FOR” IN ACTS 2:38.

A. Merritt’s Argument.

1. Argued “for” (Gr. *eis*) meant “because of” in Acts 2:38.
2. Used the illustration: “I take an aspirin for a headache.”

B. Answer.

1. Remember, illustrations illustrate, they don’t prove anything. I could as easily say, “I take an aspirin for pain relief.”
2. What does *eis* or “for” mean?
 - a. Our English word for at times expresses *purpose* and at times *cause*.
 - b. Most Greek scholars say *eis* expresses purpose, but what if it doesn’t every time? The key is, what does it mean in Acts 2:38? Can we know?
 - c. What did the same expression mean 50 days earlier. Mt. 26:28
 - d. The people didn’t think they were already forgiven. Acts 2:36f
 - e. Peter didn’t think they were forgiven. Acts 2:40
 - f. *For* has the same relationship to repentance it does to baptism. Were they to repent because they were already forgiven? Acts 3:19; 2 Pet. 3:9

IV. CHARACTER OF GOD.

1. Merritt: “It is a puny God that needs the help of water.”
2. Are we to limit God as to what He will or will not use?
3. Has anyone ever argued that God needed baptism? No, only that He chose to utilize it in the saving of mankind. Rom. 11:33f
4. Was it a puny God that...
 - “Needed” a boat to save Noah?
 - Required the blood of the Passover lamb to save Israel?
 - Needed Moses to hold his rod out over the Red Sea?
 - Had to use marches, trumpets and shouts at Jericho?
5. Why did God need to use the cross? Why was faith necessary?
6. One of the key ideas of calling on the name of the Lord is acknowledgment that His way is the only way (Jer. 10:23) and that you are willing to submit to His terms. Acts 2:21, 37f

Conclusion:

- 1) Other things that could be considered, but they won't change the commands and promises of God.
- 2) Don't lose sight of the fact that the offer of salvation by baptism is an offer of God's grace.
Eph. 2:8f; Mk. 16:15f