

Arguments Against Baptism

Introduction. Disputes often arise over unimportant affairs in life: a batting record in baseball, the best football team, the best song. Some disputes are even significant: global warming, general theory of evolution, nuclear weapons.

There are also important disputes in the Bible such as the debate over whether Jesus was the Christ (John 7:37-43) or whether circumcision and the keeping of the law is necessary to be saved (Acts 15:1).

In light of this, it is interesting to study the arguments against baptism. Many would argue that baptism is insignificant. In fact, it is not inappropriate to suggest that we have stood almost alone in the religious world in our contention that water baptism is essential for salvation. Many would simply say, "I think baptism is important, but it is not necessary in order to be saved."

The best possible action for us to take when there is a dispute concerning something the Bible teaches is to hear the Bible on that subject. In order to do this, the dispute in question must be understood and then examined in light of the scriptures.

I. ***"Baptism Is Not Always Mentioned"***

- A. Opponents say that Ephesians 2:8 and Romans 3:21-26 mention faith but they do not mention baptism as being necessary to be saved. Of course, the implication is that these verses only mention faith, so salvation is by faith only.
- B. However, faith is not always mentioned, nor is repentance always mentioned. Baptism is the same, but all are said to save (cf. Psalm 119:160, ASV)!

II. ***"Those Who Call Upon The Name Of The Lord Will Be Saved"***

- A. Another common argument is that baptism is not in Romans 10:13. This argument implies that the Bible explains what it means to call on the name of the Lord and that does not involve baptism.
- B. Let us quickly consider some popular beliefs regarding what calling on the name of the Lord means:
 1. Some who deny the necessity of baptism for salvation say, "Just accept Jesus as your personal Savior and you will be saved."
 - a) In Matthew 7:21-23, these people accepted that Jesus was Lord, but that was not sufficient to justify their claim that their works were done in His name.
 - b) Luke 6:46-47 puts the emphasis on obedience. They were calling on Him but not doing what He says (cf. Luke 8:21).

2. Some argue that calling on the name of the Lord means that a lost person must say the "sinner's prayer."
 - a) Although there may be slight differences, it could be worded as follows: "Father, I know that I have broken your laws and my sins have separated me from you. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my past sinful life toward you. Please forgive me, and help me avoid sinning again. I believe that your son, Jesus Christ died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer. I invite Jesus to become the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me obey You, and to do Your will for the rest of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen."
 - b) It is important to note that this is not a discussion about how Christians are to deal with their sins. Christians are told to pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).
 - c) This doctrine teaches that alien sinners are to pray to be forgiven, but the Bible does not teach this method of salvation. The Bible says nothing about a lost, alien sinner praying for salvation. Neither does it tell one what to say in such a prayer.
3. Some say that it simply means to believe, but it is not simply believing in Christ, for Romans 10:14 says that one cannot call until after he or she believes.

C. What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord?

1. On the day of Pentecost.
 - a) Notice that after Peter made the statement to "call upon the name of the Lord" (as quoted from Joel 2:32) in vs. 21, he said to "hear" in vs. 22.
 - b) In vss. 36-37, they ask, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter told them to repent and be baptized.
 - (1) The people in the audience did not understand Peter's quotation of Joel to mean that an alien sinner must pray to God for salvation.
 - (2) If 2:21 meant to pray to God, then 2:37 would read, "When they heard this, they all prayed to God." However, in vs. 41 they submitted to water baptism.
 - c) Belief is certainly in this text, but according to Romans 10:14 it comes before calling on the name of the Lord.
 - (1) Notice the parallel between Acts 2:21 and 2:38. "Saved" equals the "remission of sins."
 - (2) So these people who heard Peter learned that "calling on the name of the Lord" was equal to obeying the gospel in repentance and baptism.

2. In the conversion of Saul.
 - a) In Acts 9:1-11, Paul saw the bright light. We learn that during the next three days, while waiting to meet with Ananias, Paul fasted and prayed (vss. 9, 11).
 - b) Although some today might think that Paul was "calling on the name of the Lord," Ananias, God's chosen messenger to Paul, did not think so.
 - c) He equated baptism with calling upon the name of the Lord in Acts 22:16.
 - (1) Note that Ananias did not tell Paul, "I see you have already called on God. Your sins are forgiven."
 - (2) After three days of fasting and praying, Paul still was lost in his sins. Even though he obviously believed at this point, and had prayed to God, he had yet to "call on the name of the Lord" for salvation.
 - (a) Paul had done almost everything denominational preachers tell people to do today.
 - (b) He had believed on Christ, he had repented of his sins, he had mourned (three days fasting), but he had not called on the name of the Lord!
 - d) Remember the context of Romans 10:13: Hear, believe and obey (vss. 14-16).

III. ***"Zaccheus And The Thief On The Cross Are An Example For Us"***

- A. Proponents of this argument believe they have hit the jackpot because they found someone saved during the time of Christ without water baptism.
- B. As far as the thief is concerned, no man can prove the thief was not baptized.
 1. We are quickly informed that there is no mention of his having been baptized, but on that basis, we can prove that faith in Christ is not necessary for salvation, for there is not one statement to the effect that Lazarus had faith, yet he ended up in paradise (Luke 16:19-31). What proves too much proves nothing.
 2. It is indeed possible that the thief had been baptized. John the Baptist had a very widespread coverage and acceptance of his teaching (Matthew 3:5-6). John's baptism was for the remission of sins. He was also very well informed as he hung upon the cross (Luke 23:42). However, he could have been one of those who "walked no more with Him" (John 6:66).
- C. While Jesus was alive, He had power to personally forgive sins (Matthew 9:2-7). The thief was a penitent, confessing believer; he had acknowledged his own guilt and confessed the innocence of the Son of

God as well as recognized Him as "Lord." Jesus chose to pardon this man and Zaccheus as sons of Abraham who found salvation in believing on the Messiah.

- D. A will is not in force while the maker of the will is alive, but once he is dead it cannot be changed (cf. Hebrews 9:15-17). Zaccheus and the thief could not possibly be bound by the terms of Christ's will when He died because the command to be baptized for the remission of sins was not in existence. They were never subject to the gospel. Therefore, they cannot be used as standards today any more than Abraham or Moses.

IV. ***"Those Who Do Not Believe Are Condemned"***

- A. The argument is frequently made that Mark 16:16 is cited in which Jesus states that "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ..." However, the second clause in that sentence, "but he that believeth not shall be damned" states unequivocally that belief (faith) is the key element to salvation.
- B. While faith may be described as a key element in the salvation process, because it is the motive out of which additional acts of obedience arise, it is not correct to suggest that it is the only element in salvation.
1. Again, we see that such reasoning would exclude repentance. Can one be saved without changing his or her life? Surely those who argue will not so contend.
 2. When Christ affirmed that one who disbelieves will be condemned, it was completely unnecessary to add other acts of rebellion. The unbeliever is condemned at the point of his unbelief and no more needs to be said (John 3:18).
 3. Suppose we say, "He who eats and digests his food shall live, but he who eats not shall die."
 - a) Would it be sensible to say, "He who eats and digests his food shall live, but he who eats not, and does not digest, shall die"?
 - b) Can one digest what he does not eat? Is it even necessary to discuss baptism with one who is in a state of disbelief?
 4. The plain truth of the matter is that Jesus unequivocally stated that "he who believes and is baptized shall be saved."
 - a) "And" is a copulative conjunction. Both belief and baptism are equally important in the sentence.
 - b) For example, wherever one boxcar in a long freight train is pulled, the one with which it is connected moves in the same direction.

c) If the Toyota Motor Co. ran an ad that said, "He that believes and is baptized will receive a new Lexus," would anyone have any trouble understanding that?

Conclusion. Those who argue against baptism argue against obeying Christ (Hebrews 5:8-9). Baptism is part of God's will for man's salvation. One must obey and follow these commandments or they are lost (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Will you obey tonight and make it known before this crowd that you wish to be baptized? We will sing for your encouragement.