

1. Baptism, *a part of* salvation as opposed to faith only for salvation.
2. Thief on the cross
3. Baptism is not a work.
4. God is not a “respector of persons”.
5. The church of Christ

1. There seems to be a misunderstanding of the role that baptism plays in our salvation. First, I would like to establish that when we gain “salvation”, it is salvation from our sins. It is the consequences of our sins that we are saved from when we are “saved”. While there are many people who will teach that baptism is an obedient act that needs to be done AFTER salvation, the scriptures teach us otherwise about baptism. In fact, it teaches us the importance of the act of being baptized (or “immersed” as the word literally means) very plainly throughout. I will agree that faith on our part is absolutely necessary for us to gain salvation through Jesus Christ. In fact, I believe it to be the foundation of our salvation (Matt 16:18, Hebrews 11:6, 2Tim 3:15). Time and time again, the scriptures tell us that we must believe in Christ and who He is (the Son of God) in order to gain the gift of salvation that he offers. But is faith the only thing the scriptures teach that we need to do to gain salvation through Jesus Christ? Is it faith only that saves us? If you read John 3:16 (“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, *that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*”), one would have to agree that that all it takes is a faith (or a belief) in Jesus to be saved. Wouldn’t they? This is exactly what this scripture is telling us, so it must be faith only.

Well if that is the case, according to Act 3:19 (“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, *that your sins may be blotted out*, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord”) all we need to do is repent of our sinful ways. This verse is clearly telling us that if we just repent (or just turn away from doing sinful things and live a moral life) and be converted our sins will be blotted out (salvation). Is that the case? Well, you could get a lot of non-believers to consider this scripture that believe that if we live a moral life that we have done well in the sight of God and He will accept us to. And with that, they could unknowingly have scripture to back up that assertion. So, is it repentance only that is necessary for our salvation? Is that all it takes for us to have our sins blotted out as this scripture tells us? If you take this scripture only, to the neglect of all of the other scripture that talks about faith (and everything else), then you would not be considering the whole word of God...the “perfect (complete) law of liberty” (James 1:25). Certainly you would agree that it takes more than repentance to gain salvation. We know scripture (Hebrews 11:6, 2Tim 3:15, John 3:16) tells us that faith is essential to gain salvation. But, one would not know that by just focusing in on and quoting from Acts 3:19. So, considering the WHOLE of God (and not just one or a handful of scriptures) we know that it takes more than just repentance to gain salvation.

Now that we have considered that, is repentance and faith the only thing that the word of God teaches we need to do in order to gain salvation, or to have our sins forgiven (or blotted out)? Let us consider Romans 10:9 (“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, *thou shalt be saved*”). OK. According to this verse, the confession that Jesus is Lord and a belief in Him is what we

must do in order to gain salvation. But, is it those two only? We just found out that Acts 3 teaches us that repentance is also necessary for salvation. So, we can not take this verse only as our instruction for salvation. We must consider the WHOLE word of God.

I say all of that to say this about baptism. We find that throughout the New Testament, baptism is explained as something to be done that will wash away sins. It is described as something to be done for the remission of sins. The same way you believe that at the point of faith you are saved, the bible teaches that it is at the point of baptism that your sins are washed away (and therefore are saved). In Acts 2:38, after Peter preaches to the Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, he tells them (in verse 2:38) what they must do as a response to killing the Messiah. What he says that they must do is “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”). So according to this verse, we find that Peter tells them that they must repent and be baptized. For what? For the remission of sins. Would you not agree that “remission of sins” is another way to describe salvation? As I have asserted earlier that when we are saved, we are saved FROM our SINS and from the consequences of our SINS as our sins are blotted out (or washed away). So, Peter tells these Jews that in order for them to gain salvation, they must repent AND be baptized. What about faith and confession? This verse says nothing about faith or confession. So, are we to assume that Peter would hold back from these Jews the command to believe (faith) in the response they would have to gain salvation? Of course not! Not only is it implied that they had believed already (or they would not have asked the question “What shall we do?” in verse 37) but we know from other scriptures (Hebrews 11:6, 2Tim 3:15, John 3:16) that faith is necessary. Just as we know from this verse that the bible teaches that baptism is necessary.

Other scriptures that we read in the New Testament tell us the same thing about baptism, that it is necessary for salvation. It is not baptism alone, but baptism is a part of the WHOLE. 1Peter 3:21 tells us that baptism saves us. But as a believer that baptism is a necessary part in salvation, can I look to this verse and say this verse tells me that baptism will save me and expect to be saved by baptism only? Absolutely not! In doing so, I would have to ignore ALL the other scriptures that teach me that I must have faith, that I must repent, and that I must confess Jesus as Lord in order to gain salvation. In like manner, someone who believes that faith and confession only are necessary to gain salvation, they are ignoring ALL the other scripture that teaches baptism is for the remission of sins. We must look past our traditions and our preconceived ideas and trust that the WHOLE word of God is infallible (2Tim 3:16, 17) and that the word of God is the standard that we must measure up to.

Do you see how if we just take certain scriptures to try to show proof for (or proof-text) our assertions to the neglect of all other scriptures, how dangerous that can be? And can you see how it is not considering the whole truth of the word of God? In using scriptures that state that we must have faith in order to be saved (and to claim that is all it takes) and completely neglect the plain teachings of Acts 2:38 and 1Peter 3:21 (among others) that speak about baptism in regards to salvation, that is exactly what people are doing.

The word of God tells us that baptism is “**for the remission of sins**” (Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16), is being “**baptized INTO Christ**” (Romans 6:3, Gal 3:27), is “**an answer to a good conscience to God**” (1Peter 3:21), is **a burial with Christ** (Romans 6:4) and a **COMMAND from Jesus** (Mark 16:16).

2. The thief on the Cross is a common objection that I hear when people want to argue against baptism as a part of salvation. So that I understand where you are coming from, I will tell you the objection that I hear the most. It is as follows: Baptism is not necessary for salvation because Jesus forgave the sins of the thief on the cross without the thief being baptized? Hopefully, this is close to your objection and I will respond accordingly.

This objection is actually an objection out of a misunderstanding of the difference of the Old and New Laws. There are other refutations that can be made to respond to this claim, but the simplest and most important in understanding what law the thief was under when Jesus forgave his sins? Was the thief under the Old Law of Moses (where baptism was not a command for salvation) or was he under the New Law of Christ (where the bible teaches that baptism is a part of salvation)? We find in Hebrews 9:16, 17 that in order for the New Law to go into effect, there was a necessity for the death of the testator (the person in which the testament was made).

Heb 9:16, 17 “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.”

The same can be illustrated in the writing of a persons’ will (also referred to as a last “will and testament”) before they die. Now, as long as that person is alive, the will (law) that was drawn up can not go into effect. It is of no effect. A child can not collect any money from the person’s estate while the person (or testator) is still alive. So that will (law) instructing who gets what is of no effect while the “testator”. All of that changes when that person dies. Then and only then does that will (law) go into effect. In that same way, Hebrews 9:16, 17 is telling us that same thing about the Law of Christ. The Law of Christ (which includes baptism for the remission of sins or salvation) was not in effect when the thief on the cross had his sins forgiven. Christ had not died yet. So Christ’s Law (the New Law) had not gone into effect yet. The thief on the cross was still under the Old Law and therefore baptism was NOT a command for salvation. Additionally, Christ could forgive sins by any means He wanted and for what ever reason He wanted (“Matthew 9:6 But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath authority on earth to forgive sin”). There are many examples of Christ forgiving people of their sins without baptism throughout His earthly ministry. In fact, if the death of Christ was necessary for the New Law to go into effect, all the forgiving that Christ did in His ministry was under the Old Law, and therefore baptism was not a command. The forgiving of sins that Jesus granted in the beginning and the height of his ministry (Mark 2, Matthew 9, Luke 5, etc.) is the same that was done at the end while he was dying on the cross. Jesus lived his WHOLE earthly life under the Old Law of Moses which made no provision for baptism. On the contrary, the New Law in which we today are under does have the provision of baptism for the remission of sins.

3. There is another objection about baptism which claims that baptism is a work. And since we can not be saved by our works, baptism can not be necessary for salvation. Let us explore what I believe the scripture teaches us about this. The first thing I will say is that I agree that the bible teaches that we can not be saved by our works. Meaning that there are no good works we can do in and of ourselves that can earn our salvation. There is nothing that we can do on our own authority that we can do in exchange for salvation. I think that Ephesians 2:4- 9 teaches us that very point:

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us
5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)
6 And hath raised [us] up together, and made [us] sit together in heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus:
7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in [his] kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.
8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God:
9 Not of works, lest any man should boast

Ephesians 2 teaches us that it is by the grace of God that we are saved. It is ONLY because of God's love for us that He bestowed grace towards us that we might have an opportunity to reconcile ourselves back to Him. It was a gift (grace) and not something that we earned by anything we accomplished on our own authority. We can not earn our salvation from any kind of "work" that we can do on our own authority. Meaning that we do not have the authority to do something in exchange for salvation outside of what God has approved for us to do to gain salvation, though His authority. The fact of the matter is that there are things that we must "do" in order to gain salvation. As James tells us in

James 1:22- But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

So is baptism a "work" of man or a work of God? Is it from man or is it from God? God, through His inspired word has given us the authority to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16). Baptism is a work of God for it is not men who command other men to be baptized for the remission of sins, but rather God and Jesus (Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, Mark 16:16) commands us to be baptized for the remission of sins.

Interestingly enough, people who want to claim that baptism is a work (and so since we are not saved by works then baptism is not a part of salvation) hold the same claim that all one needs to do is believe or have faith in Jesus to be saved. And they hold fast to the claim that faith is not a work. Well, if we read from the book of John, an honest reader of the word of God will see how this claim will quickly fall by the wayside:

John 6:28, 29- 28 Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? 29 Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

Jesus Himself here describes that believing in God is a work. The same work that baptism is the same work that belief (faith) is. They are both works of God that we are commanded to do in order to gain salvation. They are both from God and commands of God and we MUST adhere to them. If they are from God, we as diligent, disciples of

God MUST take these “works” into consideration. Baptism is a work of God *in the very same way* that faith is.

4. Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened [his] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons

It says here that God is no respecter of persons. Other translations say that God shows no partiality. In the context of this verse, we know that this is the story of the conversion of Cornelius and his household. This conversion is of particular importance because it is the first biblically recorded conversion of a Gentile. We know from secular history as well as from biblical accounts that Gentiles and Jews did not get along. In fact, the Gentiles were viewed by the Jews as much more than a second class of people. We know from this account (vs. 16) that God had to give Peter a vision of the unclean animals and showed it to him 3 times before he was able to understand what it meant. Of course Peter would go to Cornelius’ house and the Spirit would descend on him and his household. And because of this Peter asks “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” But before the Spirit descended on them, Peter claims (vs. 34) that God is no respecter of persons. What exactly does Peter mean by this statement? Well, the vision that God gave Peter was an illustration that in God’s eyes, there is neither Jew nor Gentile as it applies to the kingdom of God (the church). In the kingdom of God, the Gentiles are equal to the Jews in God’s eyes (quite the contrary to the Old Law). In the vision (vs. 11-16), the illustration was of Peter (Jew) and the “unclean animals” (Gentiles). God commands Peter, the Jew to kill and eat the “unclean” animals. But Peter says he does not want to because he had never eaten anything unclean. And God responds that what God has cleansed shall not be called common. So in this chapter, we see the how God is reconciling the two races, Jews and Gentiles. And how, in God’s eyes, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. That is the context of this chapter...God is not a respecter of persons in who is qualified to be a child of God. He no longer made a distinction of a particular race of people as His people, as it was in the Old Testament. Now, there is no difference. And in this sense, God is no respecter of persons. It is no longer that because you are a Jew, so you are qualified to be a child of God.

To say that one is saying that God is a “respecter of persons” because the thief on the cross was saved from his sins in a different way than people today are is stating that with a misunderstanding of the context of Acts 10:34. We have already seen that the meaning of that verse does not apply to that idea. Additionally, because we are saved differently under the New Law does not make God a “respecter of persons”. People were saved under the Old Law in a different way than people under the New Law. That is pretty evident. So, does that make God a respecter of men because people under the Old Law were saved in a different way than we are today?

5. The church of Christ is not a denomination. If there are people that worship at a “Church of Christ” as a denomination, then it is not the *church of Christ*. Jesus promised to build his church and He established the His church on the faith that He is the Christ,

the Son of God (Matt 16:18). Jesus did build his church or kingdom (Acts 5: 11, Col. 1: 13). We read of the origin and growth of Jesus' church in the Book of Acts (Acts 2: 14-47, 5: 11, 14, 14: 23, see Isa. 2: 2). The church that he established is made up of all of those individuals from all over the world, throughout time that are saved. If you believe that you are saved, then you should consider yourself part of the **church of Christ** (part of the group of all individuals over the world that are saved). In the same way that I believe I am saved and consider myself part of the church of Christ. That is the meaning of the phrase "church of Christ". The phrase is not a pronoun or name but rather a description. The "church" is the collection of all saved people and they (the church) belong to Christ, hence the description "**church of Christ**". Not only is this a logical description, but it is a biblical name and idea (Rom. 16: 16, Acts 20: 28). The Lord's church in the New Testament record never wore human names (Lutheran, Methodist, etc). As a matter of fact, the church wore no names at all. Instead, we find certain descriptive designations such as ""the churches of Christ" or "churches of God" (1Cor10:32, 1Tim 3:5). Furthermore, churches in the first century were designated not by title but rather by the area that they were in. For example, the saved in Christ that worshipped in Thessalonica were called the "church of the Thessalonians" (1Thes 1:1). The same could be said of the Christians in Cenchreae (Romans 16:1), the Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1) and the Christians in Corinth (2Cor 1:1). I worship and the Embry Hills church of Christ. The church building where we meet is located in the Embry Hills section of Chamblee, hence the name Embry Hills church (the saved) of Christ. We consider ourselves saved by Christ and therefore call ourselves (in biblical terms) the Embry Hills church of Christ. We are a group of saved (we belong to Christ) individuals that meet in the Embry Hills area. At the expense of over-simplifying the point, I want you to understand why we make the distinction of calling ourselves the **church of Christ**. It is a biblical description of who we are. Now, I will admit that there are some groups that may call themselves a church of Christ that are not biblical in how they are organized or how they worship. But as you know, just because someone calls themselves something does not always make them that.