

## **Answering Some Arguments against Baptism**

People today are saved when they are baptized for the remission of their sins. Repentance and baptism were commanded at the conclusion of the first Gospel sermon (Acts 2:36-38). The only two passages in Scripture that explicitly tell one how to get “into Christ” indicate that such entrance happens at baptism (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Peter plainly declared by inspiration, “Baptism does now also save us” (1 Pet. 3:21). Every conversion account in the book of Acts mentions baptism.

Despite the overwhelming evidence in Scripture that baptism is essential, some religious people continue to object to its necessity. Consider three popular arguments against baptism:

***“Isn’t baptism an attempt to be saved ‘by works?’”*** — The Bible teaches that we are saved by grace and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 4:1-8). However, Scripture speaks of two different kinds of works with regard to salvation: works of merit and works of obedient faith. Nobody can ever earn their salvation by meritorious works (Rom. 4:4; 6:23). On the other hand, saving faith is that which trusts God and obeys what He says to do (Jas. 2:14-26). Genuine faith is lacking unless it is accompanied by works of obedience (Jas. 1:22; Gal. 5:6; Rom. 1:5). Baptism is not a work of merit as some allege, but rather it is the obedient response of someone who is putting their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. The sincerity and genuineness of our faith and love for God is demonstrated by what we do (John 14:15). Salvation is a gift offered to all (Rom. 6:23), and baptism is the means by which the Lord has declared that people may accept that gift (Rom. 6:3-6).

***“What about the thief on the cross?”*** — One of the most common objections to the necessity of baptism focuses on the promise of salvation to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:46). Those who oppose baptism for the remission of sins argue that anyone today can be saved by a mere profession of faith, just as the thief was. Several facts demand attention, however. First, Jesus had power on earth to forgive sins (Mk. 2:9-10), and thus He could do so apart from baptism. Second, the thief lived and died under the Old Covenant, and the conditions for salvation were different from what is now required (Rom. 7:1-4; Matt. 26:28). Third, the thief’s background is not given in Scripture. It is entirely possible that he was baptized by John (Luke 7:29-30). At best, it seems wildly speculative to assume that the thief on the cross proves that baptism is not essential to salvation.

***“Baptism is merely an outward expression of an inward grace”*** — Romans teaches that Abraham was saved (justified) first, and then he was later circumcised as an “outward symbol” of the covenant (Rom. 4:9-12). Since such was the case with Abraham, many religious people believe that baptism is also merely an outward symbol of one’s justification, and not essential for salvation. However, this objection fails because of what the New Testament says about the meaning and significance of

baptism. Baptism is an immersion into Christ's death (Rom. 6:3), and it is a burial with Christ (Rom. 6:4). When one rises out of the waters of baptism, God raises that person from spiritual death (Rom. 6:5-6; 2 Cor. 5:14). We "put on" Christ the very moment we are baptized (Gal. 3:27). We are sanctified the very moment we are washed with water (Eph. 5:25; Titus 3:5). We are born of water and the Spirit in the same moment (John 3:5). Baptism is not, therefore, an outward expression that one is already saved; rather, it is the point at which one comes into contact with the saving blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7). May God help all men to study His word and obey Him.    -**JB**