

The Brown Street Beacon

"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,

holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)



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Is Baptism Essential for Salvation?

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One cannot read the Bible without reading about the plan that God has revealed to save man. Scriptures are clear regarding what one must do to be saved, and those who are honest and willing to obey can know what God requires of man to be saved.

Many people are confused on the subject of baptism and a host of other subjects that pertain to life and godliness because there are many false teachers helping people to misunderstand the Bible (1 John 4:1; 1 Timothy 4:1-2). There are preachers who will say just about anything about water baptism except what the Bible says about it (2 Corinthians 11:12-13).

The following passages of scripture are plain enough for any honest, accountable person to understand.

"He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16).

Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

"There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21).

In spite of these and other plain declarations of God's word, there are many people who make various objections to baptism, and try to prove with these objections that baptism has nothing to do with being saved from sin; that it has nothing to do with one going to heaven.

The Thief on The Cross

Among the many objections that baptism is not essential to one being saved is one based on the idea that Jesus saved the thief without him being baptized. The conclusion then is, because the thief was saved by Christ without being baptized; then the same should be true regarding man's salva-

tion today.

Friends, the idea that the Lord saved the thief without being baptized and that people today can be saved without it, shows that a fundamental principle regarding the proper division of the Bible is being overlooked. Paul in his letter to Timothy told him to “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:26). A failure to “rightly” divide the “word of truth” has led to many false doctrines. In light of this objection, I ask how would one know that the thief was not baptized?

During the ministry of John the Baptist the Bible teaches he immersed many people. “Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matthew 3:5-6).

By reading John 4:1-2, we learn that Jesus through His apostles baptized more than did John. “Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (Though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples).” From reading these passages of scriptures, it seems that it would be more probable that the thief was also baptized.

The Thief and the Law-Dividing Line

The cross of Christ stands between the Old and New covenant. By “rightly” dividing the word of God, we learn that the Old Testament was not to last always. Paul made this clear when he asked the question, “What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made” (Galatians 3:19). And “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). We learn that the law was only to be temporary and was to cease with Christ.

By “rightly” dividing the word we learn that the first covenant had to be removed before the second covenant could be established, “...then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.” He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (2 Corinthians 3; Ephesians 2:14-15; Colossians 2:16, 17; Hebrews 7:18-19; 8:6-8, 10, 13 10:9-10).

Can two covenants be in force at the same time? The answer to that is no! Jesus took away the first testament that He might bring into existence the second or the New Testament. Friends, it is by this second testament that we are sanctified. The first has been removed and is no longer obligatory i.e. binding. We must keep in mind that the thief lived and died under the first covenant. We are living under the second covenant. The thief’s salvation cannot be a model case of conversion for us to follow. “But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:23-25). The word faith is used in these passages to mean the faith i.e. the system of belief (see Jude 3; Romans 10:17), and applies to the gospel. In the text the “tutor” is identified as being the law.

So before the gospel came into effect, we were under the “tutor”. But now that the gospel is in effect, we are no longer under the tutor (law).

Christ’s death on the cross is where He “Made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (Ephesians 2:14-16).

Regardless of what people did to obtain pardon while Christ was on earth, before the law was changed, the conditions of our salvation are not affected. We now live after the death of our dear Lord and Savior, and the New Testament is now in force. So we must obey it. And Jesus says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

Jesus' teachings regarding the universal necessity of baptism for the salvation of the alien sinner was not given until Jesus gave His Great Commission (Matthews 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49). While Earth Christ had the power to forgive sins (Mark 2:10).

This robber lived and died before the commission: hence, baptism, as such, had no applicability.

"What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16)