

The Bible versus the “Church of Christ”

Baptism: Part Two The Thief on the Cross and “Faith Only”

III. Saved Like the Thief on the Cross?

- A. **The Quotation:** “As we begin this brief study let us note the question concerns us, not Abraham, nor the thief on the cross. These men lived and died in past ages before Christ’s death and before the terms of pardon were announced publicly on the day of Pentecost for all who lived in the Christian age (Delton Haun, ‘Must One Be Baptized to Go to Heaven?’).”
- B. **The Accusation:** “Notice how quickly Haun attempts to avoid the issue of the thief on the cross. This is because the thief on the cross was saved *WITHOUT BEING BAPTIZED* (Lk. 23:42-43).”
- C. **The Response:** *The thief on the cross was forgiven of his sins by Jesus Himself while the Son of God was still living on Earth.*
1. While Jesus lived upon the Earth, He had the power to forgive sins immediately by His own authority (Luke 5:20-25).
 2. Jesus had the power to speak forgiven the sins of any man – including the thief on the cross.
 3. However, after Jesus returned to the Father and His New Covenant came into effect, obedience to the Gospel was essential for salvation.
 4. As a side note, one cannot know whether or not the thief on the cross had ever been baptized.
 - a. Perhaps he had received John’s baptism earlier and had fallen away in sin.
 - b. It is pure speculation to suggest he either had or had not been baptized.
- D. **The Accusation:** “Was this really a ‘past age’ before Christ’s death or before the terms of pardon were announced publicly? No, it wasn’t. The thief died *AFTER* Jesus died (Jn. 19:31-33), for no one ever died in His presence. The thief died in *THIS PRESENT AGE*, not in a past age, and the ‘terms of pardon’ were made very clear a long time before Acts 2. The Gospel of John points out over and over again that one is saved by *BELIEVING* on Christ (Jn. 1:12; 3:16; 3:36; 5:24), not by water baptism. In fact, *AFTER* Jesus had come (sic) up from the dead and returned to Heaven, John tells us that we can have life through Christ’s name by *BELIEVING* on Him, not by getting baptized in water (Jn. 20:31).”
- E. **The Response:** *The Gospel Age began on the Day of Pentecost.*
1. There are three ages of Bible history:
 - a. The Patriarchal Age began with Adam and continued to Mount Sinai. {Technically, it continued for the Gentiles until Jesus.}
 - b. The Mosaic Age began with the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai and continued until Jesus.
 - c. The Gospel Age began on the Day of Pentecost and will continue until the Lord returns.
 - d. The time from Jesus’ death until Pentecost was a period of transition from the Old Law to the New Covenant.
 2. Jesus was born, lived and died under the Old Testament – the Law of Moses.
 3. In like manner, the thief on the cross also lived under the Old Law.
 4. The fact that he died after Jesus did has no bearing on the forgiveness of his sins, for they were forgiven by Jesus personally, still under the Old Law and before His death.
 - a. All of the Apostles (save Judas) had their sins forgiven before Jesus’ death and died after He did.
 - b. However, they did not have to be baptized on the Day of Pentecost.

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- c. Those who were baptized were added “unto them” – the Apostles and the other faithful who now made up the church (Acts 1:13-15; 2:41).
- d. The key is not when the thief on the cross died, but when (during what “age”) his sins were forgiven.
- 5. Mr. Melton is right that Jesus began making the “terms of pardon” known before His death.
 - a. While faith was one of those terms, it was not the only one.
 - b. He fails to mention that Jesus commanded hearing (Matthew 11:15; 15:10; John 12:48), repentance (Luke 13:3, 5; 24:47), confession of faith (Matthew 10:32-33), and baptism (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16).
- 6. However, those “terms of pardon” did not come into force until the New Covenant was ratified by the blood of Jesus and began to be preached on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:15-17, 22-23).
- F. Men today cannot be saved like the thief on the cross because (1) the Lord is not here on the earth to speak sins forgiven, and (2) because we live under the New Covenant – the perfect Law of Liberty – the Gospel – to which we must be obedient.

IV. Salvation by Faith Only?

- A. **The Accusation:** *“Now, let’s look at a few ‘proof texts’ used by the Church of Christ to ‘prove’ that water baptism is essential for Salvation. A famous one is found in Mark 16:16.... According to the Church of Christ, one will be damned if he is not baptized. ...The truth of the matter is that Mark 16:16 does NOT teach ...that ‘faith plus baptism equals salvation’! ...One is damned for NOT BELIEVING. No one is damned for not being baptized. It is the sin of UNBELIEF that damns the lost soul to Hell...”*
- B. **The Response:** *The unbeliever is condemned because he will never obey any of the Lord’s commands, including baptism.*
 - 1. Four views of Mark 16:16...
 - a. “He that believeth not and is not baptized shall be saved.”
 - b. “He that believeth not and is baptized shall be saved.”
 - c. “He that believeth and is not baptized shall be saved.”
 - d. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”
 - e. Which one is the Bible teaching?
 - 2. It is true that one is condemned for not believing – the sin of unbelief.
 - a. This same Greek word is used to condemn those who are disobedient (Hebrews 11:7).
 - b. Faith was the essential first step; but, obedience was also required.
 - 3. However, that does not mean that salvation comes at the point of faith alone.
 - 4. The simple truth is that belief is the foundation on which submission and obedience are built.
 - a. If one does not believe in Jesus, he will not repent of sins.
 - i. By the way, repentance is essential to man’s salvation – even according to Mr. Melton.
 - ii. *“You can be saved this very moment, but you must repent of your sins (Lk. 13:3) and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour.”*
 - b. If one does not believe in Jesus, he will not confess Jesus.
 - c. If one does not believe in Jesus, he will not be baptized.
 - 5. If one truly believes in Jesus, he will submit to His will in obedience – including being baptized.
 - 6. In his argument, Mr. Melton accuses members of the church of Christ of taking this verse out of context because we do not practice verses 17 and 18.

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- a. He claims that if we practice the baptism of verse 16 then we must also practice the miracles of verses 17 and 18.
 - b. However, the reason we do not is because of verse 20!
 - c. Those miraculous powers were for the purpose of confirming the word.
 - d. Once it was revealed and completed, the need for and practice of miracles ended.
 - e. Yet, the commands to go, preach, and baptize remain in force today.
 - f. This **IS** keeping the verses in context!
- C. **The Accusation:** *“The Church of Christ specializes in confusing people by taking verses out of context and IGNORING the rest of the Bible. ... (John 1:12; 3:15-18; 3:36; 6:47; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 4:5; 10:9; 1 Peter 2:6; John 11:25-26) Now, who in their right mind would choose to IGNORE these plain and simple Salvation verses by charging to Mark 16:16 and trying to confuse matters? Any confusion that may have arisen in Mark 16:16 was cleared up in the above verses. Whatever the Church of Christ THINKS that Mark 16:16 means is immaterial. According to the scripture that you’ve just read, a sinner is saved by BELIEVING on Jesus Christ, and a sinner is damned by NOT believing on Jesus Christ. That’s perfectly clear to any honest reader.”*
- D. **The Response:** *Salvation by faith is not salvation by “faith only”.*
1. All of the verses cited by Mr. Melton teach clearly the importance of faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of one’s sins.
 - a. However, none of those verses teach salvation by faith alone.
 - b. In fact, several of them teach other things that are just as essential to one’s salvation as faith is.
 - i. John 1:12 teaches that faith gives one the power (right, authority) to become a child of God; yet, more is required.
 - ii. John 5:24 teaches that hearing is essential to salvation.
 - iii. Romans 10:9 teaches that confession of faith is also essential.
 - c. The context of the other passages shows that “faith only” was not intended.
 - i. The verses in John 3 are in the context of the New Birth.
 - ii. John 6:29 declares that faith is a work; verse 45 shows that one must be taught and hear the Word; and verse 48-58 teach that one must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Lord.
 - iii. Acts 16:32-34 shows that the Jailer was taught, repented, was baptized and then rejoiced, “believing in God.”
 - iv. Romans 4:18-22 teaches that Abraham’s faith was a trusting obedience – not “faith only.”
 - v. In 1 Peter 2:7, the opposite of “believe” is disobedience.
 - d. As seen previously, Jesus commanded other things besides faith in order for one to have forgiveness of sins.
 2. The truth is, whenever Mr. Melton sees “believe” or “faith” in the Bible he reads it as “faith only” – thus, he is the one ignoring the rest of the Bible.
 3. Mark 16:16 does not confuse the issue of salvation by faith; for, true faith will obey the commands of God!
- E. **The Accusation:** *“In Mark 16:16 the water baptism FOLLOWS the individual’s belief as a good testimony, just as taking a seat follows stepping onto a school bus. The key element in one’s Salvation is his BELIEF ON CHRIST ALONE. Water baptism is important, and it should always FOLLOW Salvation as a picture of the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ, but it cannot save anyone.”*
- F. **The Response:** *The Bible never teaches ANY of this!*

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1. Isn't it interesting that Mr. Melton accuses us of confusing matters by simply reading another verse of the Bible, while he really confuses things by teaching doctrines that are not even in the Bible!
 2. The New Testament nowhere states that baptism is a “good testimony” of one's faith.
 3. The New Testament nowhere states that “belief on Christ alone” is the “key element” in salvation.
 4. The New Testament nowhere teaches that water baptism follows salvation.
 - a. In fact, it teaches the opposite.
 - b. Mark 16:16 Baptism precedes salvation
 - c. Acts 2:38 Baptism precedes “remission of sins”
 - d. Acts 2:41 Baptism precedes “added unto them” (the church)
 - e. Acts 22:16 Baptism precedes washing away of sins
 - f. Rom. 6:3-4 Baptism precedes “newness of life”
 - g. Gal. 3:27 Baptism precedes putting on Christ
 - h. 1 Pet. 3:21 Baptism precedes salvation
 5. The New Testament nowhere teaches that baptism “cannot save anyone.”
- G. Again, the Bible teaches that baptism is an essential part of God's plan for man's salvation.