

San Juan church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About... Answering Arguments Against Baptism

This week's article is lesson four on the doctrine of water baptism. The three previous articles can be found on our website, www.sanjuanchurchofchrist.org, under "Archived Articles."

False teachers are used by Satan (2 Cor. 11:14-15) who teach that burial in the waters of baptism will not save one from their sins. Satan understands scripture (Matt. 4:3, 6; James 2:19), but omits verses that are not suited to his purpose. False teachers will also omit key verses, arguing their case that baptism does not save. The purpose of this article is to refute their most common arguments against the saving power of water baptism.

The first argument is that Jesus told "the thief on the cross" that he would be in Paradise without water baptism. Before the cross, Jesus could "forgive sins of men" (Matt. 9:2; Mk. 2:5; Lk. 5:20, 7:47-48). Jesus said, "so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Lk. 5:24). Jesus lived under the Old Testament Law (Covenant). As the Hebrew writer noted, "For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives" (Heb. 9:17). When Jesus "forgave the thief" He was still alive on the cross in the Old Covenant. After Jesus rose from the grave, the Hebrew writer says "For where a covenant is (present tense), there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it" (Heb. 9:16). Jesus gave us what He expects in the New Covenant for one to be saved "forgiven of our sins" (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:38). Notice that the disciples of Jesus heeded this commandment when every conversion in the book of Acts was followed immediately by water baptism!

The second argument is that "The 'for' in Acts 2:38 means 'because of' ". False teachers have attempted to twist Acts 2:38 "for the forgiveness of sins" by saying that "for" (eis, in Greek) means "because of" rather than "in order to." They would teach that water baptism is "because one has already been saved through belief in Jesus." One should note that Matt. 26:28 has the same grammatical construction as Acts 2:38. Jesus said, "for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out 'for' many 'for' forgiveness of sins." If "eis" means "because of" in Acts, then it also means "because of" in Matthew. And, if that's the case, Jesus is saying that His blood would be shed because man's sins have already been forgiven (i. e. the blood of Christ is not necessary for forgiveness). This is another way of saying we should be baptized "because" our sins have already been forgiven, but the Bible nowhere teaches salvation before baptism (Acts 22:16).

The third argument is that baptism is a work, and we are not saved by works. These people would say one is saved by "faith alone." The only place in scripture that "faith alone" is mentioned is in James 2:24; "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone." The view that we are saved by faith and not by works is contradicted by Jesus in John 6:28-29. The crowd said, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered them and said, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." Logically, if we are not saved by works, then we cannot be saved by faith, for Jesus says that faith (belief) is a work.

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