

# ***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **EVANGELISTIC LESSONS “Objections to Baptism”**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.* Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

If there is one thing that the New Testament teaches as essential to salvation, it is baptism in water for the remission of sins. Jesus made it so plain in Mark 16:16 that a person would have to have help to misunderstand it. Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. When Peter preached the Gospel in Acts 2, and the Jews cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (vs. 37), Peter said, “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.” In the example of Saul’s conversion, we also find that baptism was essential to his salvation. Ananias told Saul, “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). Peter said in 1 Peter 3:21 that “baptism does also now save us.” When a person hears the Word of God, believes that Jesus is the Son of God, repents of past sins, confesses the Lord’s name before men, and is baptized, that person receives the gift of salvation. But in the world in which we live, there are not many who teach that baptism is essential to salvation. In fact, many would view the Scriptures that I have just mentioned and then come up with various objections to baptism. Today, then, I want to welcome you to our study of “objections to baptism answered.”

In this study, we are going to examine objections that people often make regarding baptism for the remission of sins. We are going to examine these objections in light of the Scriptures to see if they are really valid reasons not to be baptized. Let us begin by asking, then, “What does the Scripture say?” (Jer. 37:17). What does the Scripture say about the various objections to baptism that are often made?

The first objection suggests that some people will not be baptized for the remission of sins because they believe that baptism is a work. By that, they simply mean that if they were baptized, then they would feel as if they had “earned” their salvation or that they could say, “God, I have been baptized, so You **owe** me salvation.” The Bible never teaches that when we keep the commands of God, we then can say that we have earned salvation. No one who believes that baptism is essential to salvation is going to stand up out of the waters of baptism, look up into Heaven, and say, “God, now You owe me salvation!” In the New Testament, there are two different types of works discussed—a fact that is essential to our understanding of the lack of validity regarding this particular objection. The two different types of works are conditional and meritorious. Meritorious works are works of merit. These would be like the works that the Jews did during the time of Jesus. They thought, for example, that circumcision was a meritorious work that earned them the blessing that came through Abraham. Paul, in Galatians 5:6, said, “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.” The Jews thought that because they were the children of Abraham and had Abraham’s blood running through their veins, they were going to merit salvation. Jesus, however, clearly condemned meritorious works. There are no works we can do that will **earn** salvation for us. Ephesians 2:8 says,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” We are saved by the grace of God, which is what makes salvation available. Our faith makes salvation accessible. As we think about the second type of works—conditional works—we understand in everyday life what conditional works are all about. For example, if some radio station is giving away a gift, and announces that the fifth person to call the station and says a certain phrase will win \$100, we know that if we just “believe” that we are going to receive it, we are not going to win the \$100. We must meet the conditions. We must be the fifth caller. We must say the correct phrase. And **then** we will receive the gift. Question: Did we “merit” the gift? No. But we did meet the conditions that had been set forth. The same is true as it relates to baptism. Here is a concrete way to know that baptism is **not** a work, and that nothing we do to meet the conditions of salvation is a work that “earns” salvation for us. Did you also know that in the New Testament, “belief” is referred to as a work? The people who make the claim that we cannot be baptized for the remission of sins because if we did so we would be “earning” our salvation overlook the fact that the Bible says that **belief is also a work**. Look in John 6:28-29 and notice the words of Christ. “Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’” This text clearly teaches us that belief is a work. It is not a work for **God** to do. Rather, it is a work from God **for us** to do. What kind of work is it? It is the same type of work as baptism—a conditional work representing a condition that we must meet in order to obey what God tells us to do to be saved. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father in heaven” (Mt. 7:21). After a person has done the will of God, can he or she then say, “God, You **owe** me salvation?” No. Here is what Jesus said about that. In Luke 17:10, Jesus said, “When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”

A second objection to baptism suggests that a person does not need to be baptized for the remission of sins because we are justified by “faith only”—an idea that is based upon such passages as Romans 10:13 or Acts 2:21 which teach that everyone who “calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” In other words, all a person has to do is call on God’s name, believe in the Son, and he or she will be saved. But there are two principles that we need to know here. First, we need to know **everything** the Bible has to say on a specific subject before we reach a final conclusion. Are there passages which teach that we have to believe to be saved? Sure there are. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” We have to believe. There can be no doubt about that. Acts 2:21 says that we must “call on the name of the Lord.” There is no doubt about that, either. But is that **all** the Bible says we have to do? Remember Psalm 119:160? “The sum Your word is truth.” That means that when you take **everything** that God has said on a subject and put it together, then you have the truth of what you need to do to obey God. So, yes, there are passages which teach that a person must believe. There are passages (like Luke 13:3) which teach that repentance is essential. There are passages (such as Romans 10:10 and Matthew 10:32-32) which teach that confession is essential. But we cannot take a single passage, lift it out of its context or separate it from everything else the Bible says on the matter, and then say, “**This** tells us exactly what we must do.” We must put together **all** of the passages from God’s word. Second, the only time the Bible mentions “faith only,” it says exactly the opposite of what most religious leaders are saying today. The religious world says that we are saved by faith only. The Bible mentions “faith only” one time, and it says the exact opposite of that. In James 2:24, James said, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and **not** by faith only.” James is not talking about

works of merit, but rather is speaking of conditional works. He says that a person is not saved by faith only, but is justified by meeting the commands of God and by doing what the Bible teaches to be saved. Notice again Matthew 7:21, which clearly teaches that a person cannot simply say "Lord, Lord," and be saved. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father in heaven." If "faith only" saves, then the people whom Jesus condemned should have been saved! Why? Because they said, "Lord, Lord." They had faith—faith enough to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. But they did not **do** what He commanded. Thus, a person must be baptized for the remission of sins because the Bible never teaches that faith only saves a person.

A third objection to baptism has to do with thief on the cross. Many will say that the thief on the cross was saved without baptism, and thus we can use that example for today. In Luke 23:42-43, the thief said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus then said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." There are several things we need to consider regarding the thief on the cross, the most important of which is this. The thief is not a proper example of New Testament salvation. Why is that? It is because both Jesus and the thief lived and died under the Old Testament. Colossians 2:14 and Ephesians 2:14-15 tell us that the Old Law was done away with when it was nailed to the cross. Jesus and the thief both under the Old Law. Hebrews 9:15-17 says that a will goes into effect after the person who made the will dies. If you have a will, and it states that part of your possessions are supposed to go to them, when do the children receive the possessions? It is after your death. Once the will has been probated, then they receive the possessions you have given them. That does not take place before your death. Jesus and the thief both lived and died under the Old Testament. We should not use the example of the thief, just as we would not use the example of Noah, David, or others in the Old Testament because we are not under that law. But there is something else that needs to be considered. How do you **know** (not "think," but know!) that the thief was never baptized? Consider passages such as Mark 1 and John 3, which teach that "all Judea" and the regions round about Judea went out to be baptized by John in the Jordan. Can a person say for sure that the thief was not one of those people? We know that he was a religious man and that he had some religious background. He knew something about the kingdom. He knew that Jesus was the only way to be saved. He had some kind of religious background, and although it could go either way, it is at least possible that he had been baptized by John at some point in the past. Therefore, would a person want to base his or her salvation on "just supposing" that that the thief had never been baptized? The text of 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says that we must "prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good." So, the thief is not a good example of New Testament salvation for us to follow. And he certainly is not a good reason for a person not to be baptized for the remission of sins.

A fourth objection to baptism has to do with the fact that Jesus forgave people's sins even though they were not baptized. While there is no doubt that Jesus forgave certain people's sins during the time of the Old Law without them being baptized, we need to remember that Jesus did that during the time of the Old Law, which was the time when Jesus lived. We also need to remember that Jesus, while He was the Son of God here on Earth, could forgive sins in any way that He chose. Notice Mark 2:10, which teaches that Jesus could forgive sins any way He desired. Jesus said, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, 'I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.'" Jesus said to this man, "I am going to say to you, 'Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house,' and then you will know that I have the power to Earth to forgive sins." While Jesus lived and walked in Galilee, He had the power to forgive sins.

Question: Is Jesus on the Earth today, and is He still here, directly forgiving people's sins in such a manner? No. Today, we have the Word of God, and we must go by what it says during the age of the New Testament. Think about the words of Jesus in John 12:48. Jesus said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." Jesus said that while He was on Earth, He had the power to forgive sins. But in John 12:48, He said that if people rejected Him, then on the last day His Word would judge them. Today, we are under the Word of God. And it is clear that God's Word teaches baptism as being essential for salvation.

A fifth objection is that baptism is not a condition for condemnation in Mark 16:16. By that it is meant that Jesus said in Mark 16:16, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned," but while He "seemed" to say in the first part of that verse that baptism is essential to salvation, because He did not mention it in the last part as something that people would not be condemned for omitting, then it really is not essential to salvation. It is very easy to show why this argument is not valid. If a person does not believe, is he or she even a candidate for baptism? Absolutely not! For Jesus to say, "Oh, if you do not believe, and if you are not baptized, you will be condemned," would not make any sense. The point from the verse is, according to Jesus' teaching, that if a person **does** believe, then he or she must go on and be baptized in order to be saved. But if a person does not believe, then he or she is not even a candidate for baptism. It would have been redundant (if not idiotic) for Jesus to say, "Since you do not believe, do not be baptized either."

A sixth objection has to do with the wording found in Acts 2:38 where Peter said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the remission of sins." The suggestion has been made that the word "for" means "because of." We have a lot of examples of the word "for" in the Greek language. In the majority, if not all, of those examples, it does not mean "because of." In fact, there is a clear case of the same construction that is used in Acts 2:38 being used in another text in the New Testament, and that will help us understand what the word "for" means in Acts 2. The text is Matthew 26:28. Notice how these two compare. In Matthew 26:28, Jesus said (as He instituted the Lord's Supper, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed **for** many for the remission of sins." That phrase "for the remission of sins" is the same Greek construction that is found in Acts 2:38. What does it mean in Matthew 26:28? Did Jesus shed His blood **because we had already received** remission of sins? No, He shed His blood so that we **could receive** remission of sins. There are no textual indicators in Acts 2:38 to indicate that the word "for" should be rendered as "because of," and it would be against the majority of the examples as to how that word is used. Thus, "for" really does mean "for." It means "in order to receive" or "for the purpose of." That being true, Acts 2:38 is one of the clearest passages on the essentiality of baptism. If baptism is "for" ("in order to," "for the purpose of") receiving the remission of sins, then you cannot refuse to be baptized and yet be free from sin as God has commanded."

A seventh objection suggests that Paul did not preach baptism when he presented the Gospel to various people? Really? Paul did not preach baptism when he presented the Gospel to various people?! There is no doubt that Paul talked about the Gospel a lot. And while we do not have the full record of what he said to every person on every occasion, Paul is the one who tied baptism to the heart and core of the Gospel presentation. In Romans 6:1-4, Paul likened Christ's death, burial, and resurrection—the heart and core of the Gospel—to our death to sin, our burial in water, and our resurrection from the water to newness of life.

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 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.”

If the Gospel relates to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus at its very heart and core, then Paul directly ties the Christian’s conversion through baptism to that. Paul said, “Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” The claim that Paul did not teach baptism as part of the Gospel simply is untrue, because Paul tied the two together in Romans 6:1-4.

An eighth objection suggests that in Acts 2:21, Peter said, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” There is no doubt concerning the validity of what Peter said. But as we think about what the New Testament says, we need to examine **everything** that God has to say on a particular subject and take the total of what God has said. In Acts 2, Peter went on to say other things that people often overlook. Yes, Acts 2:21 does indeed say, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But what does that mean? Peter went on to say in Acts 2 that a person must hear, believe, be convicted, repent, and be baptized (vs. 38). But here is one of the most important principles that relates to this objection. How, according to Scripture, does a person “call on the name of the Lord”? Here is the scene. Man is in sin. He is sinking in the cesspool—the muck and mire—of sin. He realizes that God is the only One Who can save him. Man is sinking in the cesspool of sin, and he cries out to God, “Save me!” What does the person have to **do**? Does he have to do **anything**? He is sinking in sin. Does he have to meet God’s conditions to get out of sin? Does he have to do whatever God says in order to get out of that predicament? How does a person properly call on the Lord’s name? In Acts 22:16, we are given a divine commentary on Acts 2:21. Notice what Saul did. Ananias said to Saul, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” How did Saul call on the Lord’s name according the Scriptures? He got up, did what God said, and was baptized for the remission of his sins in order to have those sins washed away. That is what it means to call on the Lord’s name. If we find ourselves sinking in sin, if we call out to God for help, and if God says, “Here I am; I am ready to help you,” then we have to be willing to do what God says in order to get out of that predicament. That is what Acts 22:16 is teaching us. We must get up, obey God, and be baptized in order to wash away our sins. Saying simply, “All you have to do is ‘call on the Lord’s name’ is a very shallow comment on what the Bible actually says that a person must do to be saved.

A tenth objection suggests that “the sinner’s prayer” is what saves us, and that we do not need to be baptized because we live in a world where the sinner’s prayer saves us. The sinner’s pray usually goes something like this. “Dear Jesus, I accept You as Savior. I ask You to come into my heart to save me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.” This, however, is not a proper means of salvation. You will **never** find that prayer in the New Testament. You will not find it used in the Book of Acts. You will not find Jesus reciting it. You will not find it anywhere in the pages of the Bible. How can it be a proper way of salvation if it is not even in the Scriptures? You can search for yourself, and you will find that it is not there. We also find an example of a man who no doubt prayed to God for salvation, yet still was not saved. If we could find just one example of someone who prayed, but still had to do something else to be saved, then we could clearly show that the so-called sinner’s prayer is not a proper way to be saved. Let’s do exactly that. Look in Acts 9:11-12. Here is what God tells Ananias regarding Saul:

“So the Lord said to him, ‘Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.’”

In the example of Saul, we find that, on the road to Damascus, Saul sees a bright light. He asks, “Who are You, Lord?” The response is, “I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting.” Saul then says, “Lord, what would You have me to do?” He is told, “Go into the city and you will be told there what to do.” God then begins to prepare His man Ananias to teach Saul. He tells Ananias, “Go to Saul of Tarsus. He is in a house, and he is praying. He has seen you coming in a vision.”

After Saul was presented with that bright light, and after having scales on his eyes so that he could not see, he recognized that he had been doing wrong, so don’t you know that he definitely was saying a “sinner’s prayer”? Yet, Paul still was told, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” You will not find the sinner’s prayer in the Bible, and the only time we find someone praying prior to salvation, he still had to do what God said to do to be saved. That is conclusive evidence to show that the sinner’s prayer is not a legitimate step in the plan of salvation.

An eleventh objection suggests that we are saved by the blood of Jesus, not by baptism. There is no doubt that the grace of God saves us (Eph. 2:8). It is the blood of Jesus in which we are washed (Rev. 1:5). The question we need to ask, however, is this: Since it is Jesus’ blood that cleanses us of our sin, at what point do we come in contact with Jesus’ blood? At what point in the conversion process do we come into contact with the blood of Christ so that we can have our sins washed away by that blood. Notice several passages. In Ephesians 1:7, we find, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” There is no doubt about it—Jesus’ blood definitely forgives! Look in Revelation 1:5, “And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” As we think about Ephesians 1:7 and Revelation 1:5, we see that, yes, it is the blood of Christ that cleanses us. Yes, we are washed in the blood of the Lamb. But at what point in the plan of salvation do we contact Christ’s blood? If we could learn at what point our sins are removed, at what point our consciences are clean, and at what point our sins have been washed away, then we could clearly know when we have contacted the blood of Jesus. Aren’t you thankful that the Bible tells us the exact point at which we contact Jesus’ blood, and the exact point at which our sins are forgiven? Look one final time at the words of Acts 22:16. Saul is told, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins.” What is it that washes away sins? According to Ephesians 1:7 and Revelation 1:5 it is the blood of Christ. At what point—according to Acts 22:16—are our sins washed away? It is at the point of baptism, when we properly call on the Lord’s name.

I want to encourage you today to think seriously about what the New Testament teaches about baptism for the remission of sins. There is a multitude of people who are teaching things other than what the Bible teaches. So I am asking you today, “What does the Bible say?” We have looked at numerous passages, and we have dealt with many of the arguments that faith-only proponents (and others) offer regarding their view of salvation. But they are not correct. If you want to be a Christian, you must hear God’s Word, believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of past sins, confess Christ before men, and, yes, be baptized for the remission of sins. We are praying today that if you have never been baptized to become a part of God’s kingdom, you will do so with haste.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “OBJECTIONS TO BAPTISM”

1. What did Jesus Himself teach in Mark 16:16 regarding the essentiality of baptism in the plan of salvation?
2. When the Jews cried out in Acts 2, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (vs. 37), what was Peter’s answer to their question?
3. According to 1 Peter 3:21, what “does also now save us”?
4. In the account recorded Acts 22:16, what did Ananias tell Saul to do to be saved?
5. What important question is asked in Jeremiah 37:17 that we today should always ask when it comes to matters regarding the Bible and religion?
6. What, according to Ephesians 2:8, saves us?
7. What, according to John 3:16, saves us?
8. What else, according to Matthew 10:32-33 and Romans 10:10 is essential for salvation?
9. What does Luke 13:3 teach as being essential for salvation?
10. What, according to James 2:24, does **not** save us?
11. When, according to Colossians 2:14 and Ephesians 2:14-15, was the Old Law replaced with the New Law?
12. Why is the thief on the cross not a good example of salvation for us to follow today?
13. What are “meritorious” works?
14. What are “conditional” works?
15. What does Luke 17:10 have to say about either of those types of works saving us?
16. By what will we one day be judged, according to John 12:48?
17. According to Ephesians 1:7 and Revelation 1:5, what takes away our sins?
18. According to Romans 6:1-4, at what point do we contact the blood of Christ?
19. Acts 2:21 teaches that we are saved when we “call on the name of the Lord.” How, according to Acts 22:16, does a person call on the name of the Lord?
20. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus pointed out something that is wrong with just “calling on His name.” What did He have to say about that?
21. Where in the Bible is “the sinner’s prayer” found?