

Faith Only

Cockrell – Donahue Debate 1994

Article 1 - Cockrell

"The Bible teaches that a sinner is saved at the point of faith in Christ before baptism in water."

The proposition for this debate is: "The Bible teaches that a sinner is saved at the point of faith in Christ before baptism in water." As the man who has the affirmative position it is my duty to define the proposition for our readers. By "the Bible" I mean the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. By "teach" I mean the Bible imparts or conveys the thought of my proposition. By "at the point of faith in Christ" I mean that when a person trusts in Jesus Christ with all his heart for salvation. At the point of faith the believer experiences a peace of mind and conscience which goes out of the knowledge of sins forgiven by the merits of Jesus Christ. By "before water baptism" I mean that faith comes before water baptism, and the sinner is saved without water baptism.

We are not debating over whether or not baptism is a command, for we both agree that it is. The question is: for what is baptism commanded? Is it the means of obtaining salvation, or is it to declare that one is already saved? The Bible teaches and Baptists believe that baptism is to declare that a believer in Jesus Christ has already experienced salvation.

The debate is not over whether or not men are commanded to repent, for we both agree they are. Repentance is a prerequisite to faith in Christ. Jesus Christ said: "For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matt. 21:32). Furthermore, when the New Testament speaks of repentance and faith together (Mark 1: 15; Acts 20:2 1; Heb. 6: 1) repentance is always mentioned before faith. Repentance and faith are inseparable graces, but repentance always precedes faith.

The real issue between Mr. Donahue and me is this: "is a man saved at the point of faith in Christ, or at the point of baptism?" The Bible teaches and I affirm that a man is saved at the point of faith in Christ. My opponent affirms a person is saved at the point of baptism. If Mr. Donahue and his people are correct in their contention, there should not be even one verse in the New Testament which predicates salvation on faith, for faith always comes before baptism. But the New Testament mentions often that salvation is predicated on faith in Christ. This is enough in itself to devastate Mr. Donahue's dogma of baptismal regeneration.

Mr. Donahue and I have spoken over the phone and by correspondence, but we have never met face to face. Therefore, we do not have any personal ax to grind. I feel sure from what I have heard of my opponent that he is an honorable and sincere man. He is one of the most able debaters of his people, and he is qualified to defend the position of his people. We will no doubt hear from him the best defense that they can offer the Baptists.

An error as to the way of salvation is soul-destructive. Therefore it behooves me to defend by Holy Scripture the old landmark of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. This I must do in the interest of truth and for the well being of men's souls.

In English the noun "faith" has no verb form. When it takes the verb form it is the word "believe." Hence I shall appeal to verses in the Bible which use both "faith" and "believe."

Argument One: Salvation in the Bible is said to follow faith immediately. In the parable of the sower Jesus said: "Those by the way side are they that hear: then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). Here faith in Christ is seen to be the sum and substance of salvation. Satan, the enemy of souls, does all he can to hinder men from believing in Christ and being saved. According to Jesus Christ, a man has only to believe in order to be saved. My friend and his people must add baptism to these clear and plain words of Jesus Christ, and the Bible condemns those who add to it (Rev. 22:18).

Argument Two: Jesus Christ told a woman that she was saved by her faith. In Luke 7:48 Christ said to a woman who was a sinner: "Thy sins are forgiven," and then added: "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke 7:50). Here faith is linked to forgiveness. According to Jesus Christ, this woman had received salvation through her faith. Nothing is said about her being baptized. She was saved by her faith without water baptism. My friend and his people would never say what Jesus Christ said here. Let us see if Mr. Donahue can cite a verse which says: "Thy baptism hath saved thee: go in peace."

Argument Three: The believer has eternal life: "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:15). According to Jesus Christ, faith in him brings certain and instant healing to a perishing soul. Nothing is said about water baptism. A believer in Christ is not in the half-way house to being saved; he is saved at the point of his faith in Jesus Christ.

In John 6:47 Christ said: " Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." We know that eternal life is ours as soon as we believe in Jesus Christ, who is eternal life himself. Mark the present tense "hath," not "shall have." Note also that Christ confirmed this truth by a species of oath: "Verily, verily." My opponent disagrees with these words of Christ, for he denies that the believer has eternal life. He and his people contend that spiritual life comes at the point of baptism, not faith.

Argument Four: The believer is not condemned. Jesus Christ said: "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). According to our blessed Lord, the believer shall never enter into condemnation (Rom. 8: 1) because he has already passed from death unto life (John 5:24). My friend holds a believer in Jesus is still under condemnation and must remain condemned until he is baptized by one of their preachers.

Argument Five: Faith in Christ prevents one from dying in his sins. In John 8:24 Christ said: "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. " Men must believe that Jesus is the true God and the glorious Messiah. This belief prevents one from dying in his sins. Nothing is said about the need of baptism to prevent spiritual death, for salvation comes before baptism. Where is the verse that says: "If you are not baptized, you shall die in your sins"?

Argument Six: The believer has passed out of a state of spiritual death into a state of spiritual life: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life; and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Mr. Donahue and his people teach that a man remains in a state of spiritual death until he is baptized by one of their preachers. Their teaching of baptismal regeneration is in opposition to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Argument Seven: The believer shall never hunger or thirst: "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). This verse shows that to come to Christ is the same as to believe on Christ. The one partaking of Christ by faith has a life-long feast and source of immortal strength. Those who believe in Christ have an abundant supply of the water of life and enjoy the deepest soul satisfaction. Nothing is said here about baptism. Where is the verse that says: "he that is baptized shall never hunger or thirst"?

All the verses that I have cited are the very words of Christ. He repeatedly declared that the believer in him is saved at the point of faith, and he made no mention of water baptism in the texts that I have cited. We Baptists have the very words of Jesus Christ to prove our position. We take our stand with Christ. We do not dispute or doubt the words of him who cannot lie. Since faith in Christ precedes baptism in water, our Lord would have never been guilty of saying that a man was saved by faith unless he was really saved at the point of faith.

Mr. Donahue and his people teach two different ways of salvation, but often they refuse to admit this is so. They teach that a man is not saved until he is baptized by one of their preachers. But after he is baptized for the remission of his sins he can be lost. Then he is saved the second, third, etc., time by repentance and faith like the Baptists teach. The fact that they do not baptize him again shows that they really know that a man can be saved by repentance and faith without water baptism as we Baptists teach. It would seem that logic would demand that they admit a man can be saved the first time the same way.

My questions for Mr. Donahue are as follows:

1. Whereas you teach baptismal regeneration, why do you not baptize a man in order to save him after he falls from grace?
2. How do you unbaptize a man and get him unsaved?
3. Since you do not rebaptize apostates, does this not after all prove that you believe a man can be saved by repentance and faith without water baptism?