

- You are discussing God and faith and salvation with your friend. The discussion has been profitable. Your friend has been listening intently and you think you're really going somewhere with this discussion. You begin to discuss how one becomes a Christian and you bring up the issue of being baptized in faith for the forgiveness of sins. And then you hear that dreaded question that always seems to stick its ugly head into these conversations, "What about the thief on the cross?" "The thief on the cross wasn't baptized, so that must mean that I don't have to be baptized either."
- These aren't new questions, but it was a question submitted into the Q&A box and since it is Q&A Sunday, I figured I would answer this question this morning and leave more time for some other questions tonight. This is a fantastic question because I would dare say that many of us this morning have been faced with this very question. Ladies and gentlemen, we need to be ready to give an answer. So naturally, I would like to approach this subject by asking some questions in response to their questions. People always want to throw a ton of questions at us, and we, often, seem to be stuck playing defense and never able to get away from answering all the questions thrown at us. But brethren, I think it is absolutely acceptable for us to ask some questions ourselves. Asking questions in response to questions given us might help the other person see where we are coming from a little more clearly. Don't think that you always have to do all the work and answer all the questions in a discussion. If you know the right questions to ask, then you might have a little more success in those discussions. So let's look at some questions that we need to be asking when we are presented with the subject of the thief on the cross.

5 Questions to Ask in Response

I. Are you sure that the thief wasn't baptized?

- A. The whole reason the thief is brought up is because people say that he wasn't baptized but still saved.
 1. Can this point be proven as true?
 2. If there is no evidence, then why is this such a popular argument against baptism?
- B. To the contrary, there is evidence that might suggest that this man was very knowledgeable of God and had come in contact with John or Jesus at some point.
 1. The thief seemed to have a pretty decent knowledge of God and faith.
 - a) He believed there was a God. **(v.40)**
 - b) He knew God was to be feared. **(v.40)**
 - c) He knew Jesus was associated with God. **(v.39)**
 - d) He knew something came after death. **(v.42)**
 - e) He recognized the difference between right and wrong. **(vv.40,41)**
 - f) He believed that Jesus was innocent **(v.41)**
 - g) He recognized that Jesus was a King going to His Kingdom. **(v.42)**
 - h) He believed that Jesus had the power to help his circumstances. **(v.42)**
 2. This is substantial knowledge and it is very possible, if not probable that this man had learned from John or Jesus.
 3. It is possible that the thief was a former believer who fell away from the faith and not a sinner doing first time repentance.
 4. If this man had been baptized then it would be necessary for him to repent of his sins in order to have them forgiven, and the text clearly indicates that did happen.
- C. We are not using the thief to prove baptism one way or the other, but for those who want to show that the thief wasn't baptized then they need to be able to prove that he had not been baptized at some point before the cross.

II. What law was the thief under?

- A. Man is subject to the laws of God.
 1. From creation, man has been responsible for following the commandments of God given to them at that time.
 2. Adam and Eve were responsible for not eating the forbidden fruit. **(Genesis 3)**
 3. Non-Jews from Creation to the time of the cross were responsible for following after the faith God had given to their fathers and that had been handed down through the generations. **(Heb. 11:1)**
 4. Once God called the Jews to be His people (about 1,500bc), they were responsible for following after the Law of Moses while it was in power. **(Exod. 20; Deut. 7:6-8)**
 5. Jesus, Himself being a Jew, knew His responsibility to keep the Law and He did so while on the earth. **(Matt. 5:17)**
 6. A person cannot be subject to a law that he is not under. Thief wasn't under the Law of Christ.

- B. The Law of Christ was brought into power with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 1. We are subject to the law of Christ and nothing more.
 2. Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law (**Matt. 5:17**) and that was done upon His death and resurrection.
 3. It required the death of Jesus for this New Law to have power. (**Heb. 9:15-17**)
 4. We are no longer under the tutor. (**Gal. 3:7-29**)
 5. Jesus forfeited the power of the Old Law. (**Eph. 2:8-15**)
 6. He nailed that old decree to the cross upon His death. (**Col. 2:13,14**)
 7. The thief was no more obligated to fulfill the terms of the Gospel that David, Moses, Abraham, or Noah.
- C. We are not under the same Law as the thief. Therefore, his requirements of faith were not the same as ours.

III. When did Jesus exercise the power to personally forgive sins?

- A. He exercised that power while on the earth, and He did this many times.
 1. He healed the paralytic and forgave his sins. (**Mark 2:5-12**)
 2. He forgave the sins of the woman who washed His feet with her tears. (**Luke 7:36-50**)
 3. Of course, He forgave the thief on the cross. (**Luke 23:29-43**)
- B. Jesus had the power to forgive sins as He pleased while on the earth. After His death, we must meet the terms of His will to be forgiven.
- C. The issue of death bed confessionals is not ours to judge. We must stick with the teachings of Scripture and encourage those we meet to come to Jesus on His terms and His current terms are those of the Gospel.

IV. When did Jesus say, “believe and be baptized?”

- A. This was first taught 40-45 days after the thief was forgiven while on the cross. (**Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15,16**)
- B. Peter and the Apostles were not given the keys to the kingdom until Pentecost, some 50 days after the cross. (**Acts 2:38**)
- C. Gospel belief and baptism could not have been had by the thief because Jesus had not yet died and been raised.
 1. Gospel faith is predicated on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. (**I Cor. 15:1-4**)
 2. Gospel baptism represents a dying and raising with Christ. (**Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:11,12**)

V. Are you the thief on the cross?

- A. He was a sinner condemned to execution on the cross.
- B. We have a chance to believe and obey.
- C. He was saved under a different law.
- D. We can be saved by the new law of grace through faith in Christ Jesus just like those others in Scripture who came to Jesus after the cross.
 1. Peter told those who crucified the Lord to believe and be baptized. (**Acts 2:38**)
 2. The Eunuch believe, confessed, and was baptized. (**Acts 8:37,38**)
 3. Paul was told to get up and be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. (**Acts 22:16**)

There are so many objections that will be presented to us when we give efforts to share the truth of the Gospel with those around us. Satan is hard at work to turn people’s hearts away from the simple truth of Scripture. We, as Christians, have a great responsibility to know how to respond to these objections. I hope that as we leave here this morning we all feel confident that we will know to respond. May God help us to always know how to accurately handle His Word and use it to help lead others to the faith that will save them.