

The Old Paths

Volume 12, Issue 1

March 6, 2005

“A Review Of The Jacobs-Holland Debate”

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On February 25th and 26th, this author and Mr. Roger Holland of Lafayette, TN met in Millwood, KY to engage in a debate about the necessity of baptism. Specifically, our proposition Friday night was: “RESOLVED: The Scriptures teach that baptism, to the penitent believer is for (in order to obtain) the remission of sins.” I affirmed this proposition, and Mr. Holland denied it. On Saturday night, we debated: “RESOLVED: The Scriptures teach that one is saved before and without water baptism.” Mr. Holland affirmed this proposition, and I denied it. An added bonus to the debate itself was when the disputants engaged in a half-hour question and answer session after the formal debate each evening. The questions were provided by the audience assembled, and each man was given two minutes to answer the question or offer a rebuttal. I believe this made for an interesting addition to the debate as it allowed folks to ask questions and probe deeper into certain points we did not have time to develop in the debate itself.

Courtesy Prevailed

Without a doubt, courtesy prevailed before, during, and after the debate. It was obvious that we had many folks assembled who did not agree on whether or not baptism saved, but it was also obvious that these folks could sit down together and study without

it being turned into some type of “free-for-all” wherein insults are hurled or folks were treated in a rude way. Certainly, points and arguments were made with vigor and zeal, but none spoke in any hurtful or malicious way. Sometimes, folks try to negate the effectiveness of debates by saying that the disputants used abusive language. You could not say that about this debate.

Arguments

Some of the arguments I used in debate were some of the “tried and true” points which have never been successfully defeated by those in error. For instance, one chart used simply had five passages on it. The five passages were: Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16; and I Peter 3:21. I then made the point that these five Scriptures all place baptism BEFORE salvation. Mr. Holland was then challenged to name just ONE passage in the New Testament which places salvation before baptism. In two nights and four speeches, he never did it. He was reminded that for this debate to be successful, it demanded that we look at those passages which mention baptism in order to know what God’s will is concerning baptism. While I spent time looking at these passages, Mr. Holland chose not to do it. Another argument used was simply defining the word faith (“pisteuo”) in the New Testament. According to Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, “pisteuo” (faith) is a word which has to do with conviction in Christ as the Messiah, which is “conjoined with obedi-

ence.” (p. 511). Over 250 verses in the New Testament, including such verses as John 3:16, 18; Acts 10:43; I John 5:1; Romans 1:16; and Mark 16:16 use this term. Therefore, Mr. Holland was reminded that if or when he tried to use those passages, he was in reality saying, “faith and obedience.” The chart we used with this definition (#88) was used in all four speeches. He did not appreciate this chart at all, because it essentially took away all his passages he was twisting to try to say that faith saves without obedience, or without baptism.

Another argument used was simply I Peter 3:21 on a chart. It reads, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” We then asked whether that sentence or this sentence, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also not save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” was wrong. Which one was the wrong sentence? Does baptism “now” save us, or “not” save us. In four speeches, he never told us!

Some of Mr. Holland’s arguments included going to Acts 10 in an attempt to prove that Cornelius and his house were saved “before and without” baptism. One argument used was that since the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his house, then they must have been saved. He was reminded that Acts 10 is not in chronological order, but Acts 11 is (v. 4). When we read Acts 11, we find that the Holy Spirit fell as Peter “began to speak” (v. 15). Therefore, if the Holy Spirit falling on these folks meant they were saved, then they were

saved without FAITH, because faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17). At the point that the Holy Spirit fell, Peter says that Cornelius and his house hadn't had a chance to hear the gospel, yet! Another argument from Acts 10 was based upon verse 43. It reads, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Mr. Holland used this passage to imply that they were saved without baptism since the term "baptism" is not in the verse. First of all, he completely ignored verse 48 which says Peter "commanded them to be baptized." Secondly, we carefully noticed that the word "faith" in Acts 10:43 was "pisteuo," hence "faith conjoined with obedience." The phrase "through his name" also interested us because this tells us something was done by Christ's authority. So, by Christ's authority, whoever believes ("pisteuo," faith and obedience) shall receive remission of sins. When does one receive remission of sins? This same Peter who taught Cornelius, also taught the Jews, and told them to "repent and be baptized ... for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). In addition to this, Peter would later say there was "no difference" between the Jews and Gentiles concerning how they were saved (Acts 15:9). Therefore, though the word "baptism" is not found in verse 43, baptism is definitely a part of the salvation plan!

Quibbles That Backfired

Simply put, a "quibble" is "a use of ambiguous, prevaricating, or irrelevant language or arguments to evade a point at issue" (Webster's). Through the course of any debate, some debaters, when they do not have Scripture to prove their doctrine,

will grasp for some "quibble" that they think helps their cause. Mr. Holland was no exception.

1) Mr. Holland tried to use the old excuse about the man in the desert who wants to be saved and has no water. He was trying to create prejudice among the people, asking how God could condemn an honest man who just couldn't find water to be baptized. In answer, I displayed a picture of the 3rd Infantry Division baptizing men in the desert (Kuwait City) right before a battle on March 12, 2003! Yes, baptism "in the desert"!

2) Another time, Mr. Holland declared that folks have to have their heart circumcised. He read Colossians 2:11, giving a great explanation of the need for folks' sins to be "cut away" from the heart. However, he never told us "how" this happened! Simply following his argument, it was not hard to show folks that God's "operation" of cutting sins loose from the heart occurred in baptism, and in so doing, our trespasses are forgiven (Col. 2:12-13)!

3) One argument Mr. Holland likes to use is the following, "If you say we have to do something to be saved, that is a rule. If it is a rule we must follow, then this is a law. This law is a work, and if it is a work we follow for salvation, then Christ died in vain." Using his logic, I simply told folks to read John 6:28-29.

There, the people asked Jesus, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." I asked him, "Jesus said that faith is a work. Since faith is a work, did Christ die in vain when we believe on Him?"

Conclusion

More could be said, but this short article gives you some insight into what happened on February 25th and 26th. There were some 300 folks present on Friday, and 200+ there on Saturday. I am thankful that the gospel could be presented to such a diverse group both nights, and pray that the folks present will allow God's word to penetrate their hearts and produce much fruit for God. Yes friends, debates do good! Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. We find many examples of Jesus debating, as well as the apostle Paul, Stephen, and others. In times of controversy, when both sides of a subject are presented, the truth shines even brighter! I honestly believe that the honest heart who was present, or who hears this debate through various media will be able to learn and follow the truth of God's word. Let us be praying for more opportunities to teach God's word, and be active in pursuing opportunities for both public and private Bible studies.

More Information About The Debate Can Be Found At:
www.southside-churchofchrist.com



I want the truth, give me book, chapter, and verse!

Come and meet with the church at Southside.
Our address is: 2920 New Hartford Rd. Owensboro, KY 42303.

MEETING TIMES:

Sunday Morning Bible Study _____ **9:30 am**
Sunday Morning Worship _____ **10:20 am**
Sunday Evening Worship _____ **6:00 pm**
Wednesday Evening Bible Study _____ **7:00 pm**

Our call-in radio program is on **WBIO, FM 94.7**, Sunday afternoon from 12:30-1:00 pm. **Call: 683-9246 (WBIO)** with your Bible question.

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