

What Must I do to be Saved?

INTRODUCTION

The fact that you are reading this article means you have probably reached the first step in answering this question—you are aware that you (like all of us) need saving. In our post-modern society where everything is relative and "I'm Okay, You're Okay," too many people either don't care or may think just being a good person is enough.

The reality is that we're not okay and no one can be good enough. The psalmist recognized that: "All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Psalm 14:3) So did the Apostle Paul: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) In a corrupt world, we may look okay by comparison, but such a relativist approach ignores how far we are removed from a perfect God.

It is only through the grace of God that we can be saved. Salvation is a gift of God. At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the fact that we human beings have a role in accepting this free gift. Paul put it this way in his letter to the Christians in the city of Philippi: "*So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*" Salvation is not a specific event; it is a process, a path that leads to eternal life. That path will not be precisely the same for each of us, but the Bible teaches the critical parts of it.

Here is what the Word of God tells us about the path of life:

1. Recognize that we sin and need saving
2. Believe that Jesus Christ is capable of saving us (faith)
3. Seek forgiveness for our sin (repentance)
4. Turn to Jesus for help (confession)
5. Die to our sinful nature and be born again (baptism)
6. Associate with other Christians (church)
7. Continue to grow more in the likeness of Jesus (maturity)
8. Reflect Jesus in our lives and make other disciples (fruitfulness)

This is not a list to be ticked off, and some make say, "Well, what if I don't _____ (fill in the blank)? I am still saved?" I don't know the answer to that, but it's the wrong question. As you look at that list, are there any you can think of a reason not to want? If you read this entire article, I hope your conclusion will be "I want them all!"

One of the problems the modern world has is with the concept of sin itself. Our society seems to have lost its capacity for shame and come to believe that just about anything is okay as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else (or even sometime when it does, if the circumstances demand). Despite all the good that some people may seek to do, it doesn't take much looking around at our world to recognize the real nature of humanity. But sin isn't just doing something wrong—sin is anything that separates us from God. Because God is holy and totally perfect, being a human being makes it impossible for us to avoid sin. We cannot lead sinless lives—God knows that, and that's why he gave us a way out of our own predicament. Having sent Jesus to the cross as a sacrifice, God made it possible to be saved despite our on-going sins.

What Must I do to be Saved?

Ultimately, the only sin that can block our relationship with God is the rejection of Christ Jesus.

The path to salvation is fully documented in the Bible and will be explained in this article. A popular notion within the Christian community is that you can simply “pray Jesus into your heart,” but while that may be an admirable attempt, there is absolutely no scriptural basis for such a prescription, and it may be dangerously misleading. As a Christian, there can be only one source of information about salvation—the inerrant Word of God (the Bible). Anything else is just the opinion of men—the kind of tradition that Jesus condemned when he said, “*You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.*” (Mark 7:8)

RECOGNIZE THAT WE SIN AND NEED SAVING

Why is humanity lost? In Salvation is Forever, Robert Gromacki lists six reasons:

1. Because of rejection of biblical revelation

- *The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. (Psalm 19:1)*
- *...and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14:17, quoting Paul)*
- *...because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)*

2. Because of disobeying our own consciences.

- *For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus. (Romans 2:14-16)*

3. Because of our relationship to the world

- *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 2:1-2)*
- *... do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)*
- *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)*

What Must I do to be Saved?

4. Because of our relationship to Satan

The idea of a supernatural being who is bent on the destruction of humanity is difficult in a world that often rejects the supernatural, but the Word of God is clear that Satan (sometimes referred to as "the god of this world") is living and active in deceiving His children. In fact, Satan even tried to deceive Jesus.

- *Again, the devil took Him [Jesus] to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." (Matthew 4:8-9)*
- *Jesus said to them "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:42-44)*
- *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)*
- *By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:10)*
- *We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. (1 John 5:19)*

5. Because of our relationship to sin

- *Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one! (Job 14:4)*
- *Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins. (Ecclesiastes 7:20)*
- *And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." (Mark 7:20-23)*
- *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned... (Romans 5:12)*
- *So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart... (Ephesians 4:17-18)*

Note that God does not really differentiate among types of sin—it's not an issue of being "bad" or "good" in worldly terms. While an individual may not be as bad as s/he could be, s/he is still as bad off as s/he can be.

6. Because of our relationship to God

- *"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36)*
- *Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:12)*
- *He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. (1 John 5:12)*

What Must I do to be Saved?

- *These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.* (Jude 1:19)

BELIEVE THAT JESUS CHRIST IS CAPABLE OF SAVING US (FAITH)

To be an effective savior, Jesus must be both capable of saving and willing to save.

Jesus is capable of saving because He was and is both fully human and fully divine. He came to earth specifically to show humanity what a sinless life looked like and to be offered up as the ultimate sacrifice to forgive the sins of all. Having been fully human, He suffered from the same kinds of temptations we all do; so He is able to help us in our temptations. Since the Godhead is holy, He cannot be directly approached by sinful man, but Jesus is able to act as our mediator—one who has experienced life as a human but who is actually as aspect of God (part of the Trinity).

When Jesus went to the cross, he took the sins of all humanity on His back and suffered cruelly. The only cleansing element God has ordained is blood: And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Hebrews 9:22)

Given His divine nature, it is hardly surprising that Christ Jesus is capable of saving us. What is truly incredible is that He is, in fact, willing to save us. He demonstrated that willingness throughout his earthly ministry. For example, leprosy was one of the most feared diseases when Jesus lived, particularly among Jews since it made one ceremonially unclean and therefore unable to participate in temple functions. Yet, Jesus reached out even to the lepers:

And a leper came to Him and bowed down before Him, and said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. (Matthew 8:2-3)

Jesus' willingness does not extend just to a relatively few individuals, it is for everyone who has faith in Him and reaches out to Him.

- *This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.* (1 Timothy 2:3-4)
- *The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.* (2 Peter 3:9)

Two things should be apparent from these verses written by the Apostles Paul and Peter: (1) God wants everyone to be saved, not just a pre-determined few and (2) repentance is the next step in establishing the relationship with God.

Faith is absolutely essential to salvation: *"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."* (Hebrews 11:6)

What Must I do to be Saved?

Faith is produced by the Word of God, not by some blind leap, speculation, or opinion: *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."* (Romans 10:17) Preaching is one way you can hear the Word, or you can read the Word: *"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."* (John 20:30-31)

Yet, despite the enormous emphasis on faith and belief in the Bible, it is not totally sufficient: *"You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder."* (James 2:19) Faith and belief are necessary, but God expects us to meet him partway.

So if you have come to recognize your separation from God (sin), go to a Bible-believing church and hear the Word, or seek out someone with whom you can read the Scriptures.

SEEK FORGIVENESS FOR OUR SIN (REPENTANCE)

Repentance is not reformation, remorse, or penitence. We cannot sufficiently reform ourselves to be worthy of a relationship with God. Remorse, or feelings of guilt, for our sins is certainly a step toward repentance, but repentance is an action, not a feeling. And no amount of penitent acts will make up for one's sins.

Perhaps the most important biblical example of people asking "What must I do to be saved?" comes early in the Book of Acts when the Apostle Peter preached to the assembled masses after the miraculous appearance of the Holy Spirit among the disciples. Peter used Old Testament prophecies to prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah and concluded emphatically: *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."* (Acts 2:36)

Luke (the writer of Acts) reports that the people were "pierced to the heart" and collectively asked, *"Brethren, what shall we do?"* (Acts 2:37) Peter's immediate response is revealing: *"Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* (Acts 2:38) Clearly, Peter did not consider their remorse (pierced to the heart) repentance or he would not have told them to repent. What he was telling them to do was to turn away from their rejection of Jesus and turn to faith in Him (I'll get to baptism shortly).

Repentance, then, is absolutely essential to salvation. It does no good to claim to have faith if it leads to no change. Repentance is a turning away from one's rejection of Jesus.

TURN TO JESUS FOR HELP (CONFESSION)

If repentance is one side of a coin, confession is the other. Just as it is not sufficient to merely have an academic faith in Jesus, it is also not sufficient to merely turn away from rejection, for Jesus said, *"He who is not with Me is against Me"* (Matthew 12:30a).

What Must I do to be Saved?

If you were developing an exclusive relationship with someone, it would not be enough just to turn away from a previous relationship. You must also turn to this new person—this is what confession is about. There is no formula for confession—it can be as simple as an affirmative response to the question, “Will you make Jesus Lord of your life?” But scripture indicates the confession should be public: *“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.”* (Matthew 10:32-33) These words of Jesus seem to contradict that popular notion that you can simply “pray Jesus into your heart.”

Why would anyone who believes in Jesus refuse to confess? The Apostle John reports one such instance: *“Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.”* (John 12:42-43)

The Apostle Paul also wrote about confession: *“But what does it say? ‘THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart’...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”* (Romans 10:8b-10)

Clearly, confession is absolutely essential to salvation. But again, even confession is not sufficient: *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.”* (Matthew 7:21) One can go through all the “steps”—hearing the Word that leads to faith, turning away from unbelief in repentance, confession of Jesus, and yet if all that leads to no action, it is meaningless because it has all been done clothed in our sinful nature. This then leads us to an important event along the path: baptism.

DIE TO OUR SINFUL NATURE AND BE BORN AGAIN (BAPTISM)

It is extremely unfortunate that baptism requires explanation. It is clearly indicated in the Scriptures, but for some reason many believers resist or distort it. Because of this, it is necessary to spend considerably more time discussing baptism than other things. Please understand that just because this section is longer than the others does not imply that baptism is any more (or less) important! First, some basic passages about baptism:

- *• And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:18-20, “The Great Commission”)
- *Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:37-38)*
- *For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Galatians 3:27)*

What Must I do to be Saved?

- *Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:21)*

It is clear that Jesus and His Apostles commanded baptism as part of the process of salvation, but why? What is it about this seemingly primitive rite that contributes to developing a relationship with God? Is it a work? What kind of baptism? Is infant baptism biblical? What about baptism for the dead? Is baptism necessary for the children of believers?

I'm going to take some time to discuss baptism here—not because it alone has redemptive power, but because so many well-meaning people who claim to be Christians and lead otherwise exemplary lives deny the necessity of baptism.

Baptism is simply a symbolic death—killing off our sinful nature and replacing it with Christ's. Being lowered into water represents death (just as Jesus died on the cross) to be raised up (just as Jesus rose from death) to a new life. Saying one is a "born-again Christian" is redundant—all Christians are to be born again in this way: *Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3)

The Apostle Paul described the symbolism of baptism in his letter to the church at Rome: *"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin."* (Romans 6:3-7)

Through baptism we are joined to Jesus and we are given the Holy Spirit, who serves as our Counselor as we continue our perilous walk through a lost world until we rise again to join Him again in Paradise. Without the Holy Spirit, as well intentioned as we may be, we are like a rudderless ship sailing on a tempestuous sea.

There is even more compelling evidence for the importance of baptism:

1. Jesus was baptized.

- *Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."* (Matthew 3:13-17)

2. Jesus baptized.

- After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. (John 3:22)

3. Paul was baptized.

- *So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul [Paul], the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by*

What Must I do to be Saved?

which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened. (Acts 9:17-19)

4. Peter baptized.

- *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days. (Acts 10:44-48)*

Note: some might use this incident to show that the Holy Spirit can be received without baptism, as it was here, but it is important to recognize this as an exception that God performed in order to show Jewish Christians that Jesus' sacrifice was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Before this, some Jewish Christians were apparently refusing to baptize Gentiles. There are always exceptions to every rule, but that doesn't nullify the rule. And God made this exception.

5. Paul baptized.

- *Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. (1 Corinthians 1:16)*

One commentary I recently read used the verse following this one to show that baptism was not part of salvation. Here's the verse:

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (1 Corinthians 1:17)

That's the problem with pulling individual verses out of context (sometimes referred to as proof-texting). If you don't have the whole context, a verse can be used to prove just about anything. Here, Paul is saying that he rarely baptizes because his primary ministry is preaching the gospel. From other verses (i.e., Romans 6:3-6) it is obvious that Paul recognized the importance of baptism.

6. Every example of conversion in the New Testament involves baptism.

Here they are:

- *The crowd in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:37-41)*
Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.
- *Samaritans and Simon the Magician (Acts 8:9-13)*
Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This

What Must I do to be Saved?

man is what is called the Great Power of God." And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

Simon the Magician subsequently became jealous of the miracles practiced by the Apostles and asked to buy that power, for which he was severely rebuked. Baptized Christians still make grievous errors and sin, but the indwelling of the Holy Spirit serves to continually cleanse as long as we make the effort to make Jesus Lord of our lives and do our best to live like Him. The fact that we often fail only proves our humanity.

- **The Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-39)**

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:

*"HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER;
AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT,
SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.
"IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY;
WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION?
FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH."*

The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.*

- **Saul (Paul) (Acts 9:17-19; 22:12-15)**

So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened.

"And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him. "And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will

What Must I do to be Saved?

and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. 'For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 'Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

Ananias recognized that Paul had been personally appointed by God to preach the Gospel, and yet he still insisted that Paul be baptized.

- **Gentiles at Caesarea (Acts 10:44-48)**

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

- **Lydia (Acts 16:14-15)**

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

- **The Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:27-34)**

When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

- **Crispus and other Corinthians (Acts 18:5-8)**

But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

- **Ephesian believers (Acts 19:1-5)**

It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we

What Must I do to be Saved?

have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

These believers had been baptized, but since it was not a Christian baptism (in the name of Christ Jesus), Paul insisted upon a proper baptism.

By now, I hope it is apparent that baptism is not trivial consideration. It is critical because of what it accomplishes (see Romans 6:3-7 again). There are, of course, passages about salvation that don't mention baptism; i.e., Romans 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Ephesians 2:8-9, but remember that in every case where this is true, the writer was addressing saved believers, who had already been reconciled. There is no need to preach baptism to the baptized—it was considered a basic teaching:

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

The epistle writers were concerned with urging the saved on to maturity and maintaining sound doctrine. There is only one baptism (see Ephesians 4:4-6), but developing a more mature faith is an on-going process. Using verses like Ephesians 2:8-9 to deny the necessity of baptism is like using 1 Peter 3:21 (*Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*) to suggest that baptism has redemptive power without faith. Both suggestions are grievous errors.

Having established the purpose and the importance of baptism, let's turn to some of the other questions.

Is baptism a work?

Some insist that baptism is not a part of the salvation plan because it is a work and therefore violates the principle of Grace:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

(Romans 3:28)

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Salvation through Christ Jesus is a free gift of God out of His boundless lovingkindness. But God gave us free will and we can choose to accept this gift or reject it. Baptism is our responsive acceptance of the Grace of God. If you are given a present by someone, does any credit fall to you for accepting it? Baptism is not a work in any meaningful sense of the word. When biblical writers point out that no one can earn his or her salvation, they are describing the futility of good works. No amount of good works can reconcile you to God.

In baptism, you do nothing—you can't baptize yourself. Someone, acting as an instrument of God's grace, lowers you into the water and lifts you back up again.

What Must I do to be Saved?

Nothing that person does is contributing to your salvation—it is God’s work in uniting you with Christ, forgiving your sins, and giving you the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is not a work.

What kind of baptism?

It would be overly legalistic to insist on a specific method of baptism, but it is important to understand that the Greek word *baptizo* means “to dip, sink.” The Greek word for sprinkling, *rhantizo*, is used only in reference to the Old Testament practice of sprinkling the blood of sacrificed animals. Because of this, it appears that the New Testament practice was baptism by immersion.

This is apparent in at least one baptism in Acts: *And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both **went down into the water**, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they **came up out of the water**, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.* (Acts 8:38-39, emphases added)

One early Christian document known as the Didache, or The Teaching of the Twelve, specifically dictates immersion, even preferring cold running water to standing water. Pouring over the head (three times) is permitted only if immersion is not possible. This document is not part of the New Testament canon, but it was revered by the early church and is an indication of its practices.

I have heard it argued that the Jordan River, where many were baptized, is little more than a stream, too shallow for immersion. But it may have been plenty deep in spots in the First Century. It really does no good to debate on this basis since the meaning of baptism is clear. I am not going to claim that you are not saved if you are not immersed—that is a decision you need to make after you examine the Scriptures.

Is infant baptism biblical?

No. Baptism alone has no more redemptive power than an ordinary bath. The New Testament pattern is faith, repentance, confession, followed by baptism. What faith can an infant have? How can an infant be separated from the God who created him or her? What public confession can an infant make? The doctrine of original sin falling upon the newly born is a cruel hoax designed to enslave people. We become enslaved by our own sin as we allow ourselves to be influenced by the world and by Satan.

Jesus Himself welcome children into His midst, even saying *“Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”* (Matthew 19:14) How can the kingdom of heaven belong to unrepentant sinners?

Some point to the household baptisms of the Philippian jailer and Lydia as evidence of the baptism of young children, but there is no indication that there were young children in these households. In those days, the household included not only family, but also servants.

What Must I do to be Saved?

There is no magic age for baptism. I was baptized at 36, after years of separation from my Maker, by a man who was baptized at seven. Baptism should occur when one is aware of one's separation from God, acquires faith through hearing the Word, turns away from sin, and confesses Jesus. The specific age is a matter between God and the individual with the possible counsel of parents and other Christians.

What about baptism for the dead?

Those who practice baptism for the dead (most notably the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or Mormons) point to a single Bible passage:

"Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?" (1 Corinthians 15:29) If one looks at the context of this verse, however, it becomes obvious that Paul is not endorsing this practice. Apparently, there were some within the Corinthian church who questioned or even denied the future resurrection of believers, yet were baptizing for the dead. Paul's argument is simply this: if there is no resurrection of the dead, baptizing them is a waste of time.

Again, the New Testament pattern of conversion—faith, repentance, confession, baptism—places baptism for the dead in the same category as infant baptism, for how can the dead repent? How can the dead confess?

From the evidence of the rest of the New Testament, as well as the writings of the early church fathers, baptism for the dead was practiced only by some in this maverick congregation in Corinth.

Is baptism necessary for children of believers?

There are those who point to Old Testament scriptures to claim that children of believers are covered by the faith of their parents, but there is no New Testament basis for this contention. The New Testament offers no alternative to individual faith, repentance, confession, and baptism—while godly parental instruction can certainly help lead children to salvation, it doesn't guarantee it, and each of us is individually responsible.

ASSOCIATE WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS (CHURCH)

The idea of a solitary Christian is really an oxymoron.

The lure of Satan and sin is powerful, and without the encouragement of other believers, all of us quickly fall back into the things that separate from God. Jesus established His church based on the solid foundation of faith and confession, telling His disciples, *"the gates of Hades will not overpower it."* (Matthew 16:18). His church can withstand Satan, but individual Christians cannot.

The Greek word translated church is *ekklesia*, which simply means an assembly of a specific group of people—those called out for a particular purpose. In ancient Greece, the citizens were called out by a herald to democratic assemblies where they would consider matters of common concern (see Acts 19). The term was applied to Christians as those who were called out by God for a special purpose. Any group of assembled believers is therefore an *ekklesia*, or a church.

What Must I do to be Saved?

In the New Testament, the *ekklesia* refers to one of two groups: (1) all believers worldwide, such as in Ephesians 5:23-30 and Hebrews 12:23, or (2) a specific group of believers. The *ekklesia* could refer to all believers in a particular city or region, such as Jerusalem (Acts 11:22), Antioch (Acts 13:1), Galatia (1 Corinthians 16:1), Asia (1 Corinthians 16:19), Macedonia (2 Corinthians 8:1), or Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1); or a small group that met together in the home of one of the believers, such as Prisca and Aquila in Rome (Romans 16:5) and Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:19), Philemon in Colossae (Philemon 1:3), or Nympha in Laodicea (Colossians 4:15).

Collectively and individually, Christians are referred to by many other titles in the New Testament:

- saints (*hagios*) or holy (made so by the blood of Christ), such as Acts 9:13 and 1 Corinthians 1:2
- the faithful (*pistos*), e.g., Colossians 1:2
- children of God, e.g., 1 John 3:1
- heirs of God; e.g. Romans 8:17
- a chosen race (1 Peter 2:9)
- a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9)
- a people for God's own possession (1 Peter 2:9)—or the King James translation, a peculiar people

The nature of the church is that of a living body (Ephesians 1:22-23) with Christ as its head (Ephesians 5:23). Each of the members of the body (the *ekklesia*) has his or her unique contribution to make to the overall work (1 Corinthians 12:12-30). Paul compared the relationship of Christ to the church as that of husband and wife (Revelation 21:9 refers to the church as the "bride of Christ").

The first believers clearly understood that the church was a collection of believers, each called out for service to God. Furthermore, the church is an organism, as Paul described in 1 Corinthians 12, with each individual dependent on others and equally valuable. As he commended the individual believers in Rome (Romans 16:1-15), he was probably thinking of them in precisely those terms.

Do not confuse the church with the organized religion of today. Certainly, many operating under the banner of "the church" have failed to live up the standards Jesus and the Apostles established. This is the result of flawed people, not a flawed concept. There are countless examples through the ages of organizations that wantonly violate the Word of God, yet the church of Christ remains and even within groups misrepresenting God's Word, there are many faithful believers.

In the early days of the church, believers gathered on the Lord's Day in private homes but as the church grew, it was inevitable that larger facilities would be needed. Even within the New Testament, there is evidence that larger meetings were held. Paul notes that Gaius, for example, hosted the entire church in Corinth (Romans 16:23). There is nothing inherently wrong with large gatherings as long as the church fulfills its God-given purposes.

Purposes of the church

- Stimulating one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 12:24)
- Encouraging one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13)
- Psalms/Singing (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16)
- Teaching (1 Corinthians 14:26, 1 Timothy 4:13)

What Must I do to be Saved?

- Revelation/Testimony (1 Corinthians 14:26)
- Exercising Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:6-8)
- Admonishing (Romans 15:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:14)
- Charity (Romans 15:26)
- Spiritual Development (Hebrews 6:1)

Most of these can only be done effectively by groups; that is, the church.

CONTINUE TO GROW IN THE LIKENESS OF JESUS (MATURITY)

There's a song by Amy Grant that expresses the attitude of many Christians:

I know a man, maybe you know him, too.
You never can tell; he might even be you.
He knelt at the altar, and that was the end.
He's saved, and that's all that matters to him.

His spiritual tummy, it can't take too much.
One day a week, he gets a spiritual lunch.
On Sunday, he puts on his spiritual best,
And gives his language a spiritual rest.

He's been baptized, sanctified, redeemed by the blood,
But his daily devotions are stuck in the mud.
He knows the books of the Bible and John 3:16.
He's got the biggest King James you've ever seen!

I've always wondered if he'll grow up someday.
He's momma's boy, and he likes it that way.
If you happen to see him, tell him I said,
"He'll never grow, if he never gets fed."

He's just a faaa...
He's just a fat little baby!
Wa, wa, waaaaa....
He wants his bottle, and he don't mean maybe.
He sampled solid foods once or twice,
But he says doctrine leaves him cold as ice.
Ba, ba, ba, ba...ba, ba...ba, ba!

The path of salvation is growth in the Lord. It does not lie in the performance of individual, isolated events. The emphasis in the New Testament is on a dynamic, growing faith. When we first become Christians, we all know how far we are from being what God wants us to be, and we usually have a fire to learn everything we can. But somehow in the ensuing years, we lose that passion and often settle into comfortable complacency. We're saved, and that's all that matters.

But the Apostles taught something very different.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith,

What Must I do to be Saved?

*and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, **we are to grow up in all aspects** into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 5:11-16, emphasis added)*

*...He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are **increasing**, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:4-8)*

In these passages, Paul and Peter are addressing Christians. They make it clear that a major part of being a Christian is to grow into maturity.

REFLECT JESUS IN OUR LIVES AND MAKE OTHER DISCIPLES (FRUITFULNESS)

Fruitfulness is the ultimate test of discipleship. Jesus said, *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."* (John 15:7-8) There are some who use such passages to preach the "gospel of abundance," claiming that God bestows material blessings on His followers, but such a belief is contrary to both the Word of God and good sense. One only need look around to see that there is no distinction between believers and unbelievers when it comes to the wealth of this world.

The kind of fruitfulness Jesus referred to take two forms:

1. Internal characteristics or what Paul referred to as the "fruit of the Spirit," which he described as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." These characteristics are not really inherent to human beings, but as we **mature** in the Lord, we exhibit them more and more, becoming more like Jesus.

2. The second aspect of fruitfulness has an external component, and it is often a controversial topic among Christians—evangelism. The word "evangelize" (Greek, *euaggelizo*) comes from two roots: *eu* (good, well) and *aggelos* (a messenger, angel), so the word literally means "a messenger of good (news)." The word "Gospel" (Greek, *euaggelion*), which literally means "a message of good," comes from the same roots, so an evangelist is simply a Gospel messenger. In most Bible translations, *euaggelizo* is translated "preach the Gospel."

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is a simple command to evangelize the world, and it is evident that the Apostles and many other disciples took Jesus'

What Must I do to be Saved?

instructions very seriously; *"And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching [euaggelizo] Jesus as the Christ."* (Acts 5:42) Evangelism was not an occasional event for the ekklesia, notice that it was a every day.

Writing to the churches of Asia, Peter said *"...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."* (1 Peter 3:15)

When Saul persecuted the ekklesia, the believers were scattered, but they went on evangelizing (Acts 8:1). Philip evangelized in Samaria (Acts 8:12,25) and elsewhere (Acts 8:40). He evangelized to the Ethiopian court official (Acts 8:35) Believers from Cyprus and Cyrene evangelized in Antioch (Acts 11:20), founding the great missionary church of the New Testament. Paul, after his conversion on the Damascus Road, conducted a series of missions with the express purpose of evangelizing (Acts 13:32; 14:7, 15, 21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18). He had a particular passion for evangelizing in areas that hadn't heard about Jesus (Romans 15:20) and considered himself compelled to evangelize (1 Corinthians 9:16), having been personally commissioned to do so by Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:17).

Evangelism is absolutely essential to salvation of the world: "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:17) Without those who preach (*euaggelistes* or *kerusso*), Paul suggests that others cannot be saved.

What was the form of preaching in the early church? Jesus taught that *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind", calling that the "great and foremost commandment."* (Matthew 22:37-38) Loving with the heart relates to emotion, loving with the soul to spirituality, and loving with the mind to reason. All three were part of New Testament preaching.

- *The Ethiopian court official asked if he could be baptized after hearing Philip preach the Gospel, "and Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."* (Acts 8:37a)
- *Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.* (James 1:21)
- Paul was probably the best New Testament example of a reasoned evangelist: *And he [Paul] entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.* (Acts 19:8)

So the evangelism of the ekklesia involved experiencing God, worshipping God, and explaining the Gospel.

The second century seems to have ushered in an era dominated by witnessing (martyrs) and intellectual evangelism (apologetics). Many detailed treatises were written, many ostensibly to Roman officials including emperors. For example, in his first apology, addressed to Emperor Antonius Pius (138-161), Justin Martyr lays out the case for Christianity and demands a judicial investigation. One of the primary purposes of Justin's apologies and others was to convince the Empire that

What Must I do to be Saved?

Christianity was not a threat; hence, Justin wrote that Christ taught civil obedience. He refuted charges that Christians were atheists, he cited ancient prophecies of the Christ, he attacked certain pagan practices (such as exposing unwanted children), and he described Christian practices such as baptism, the eucharist, and weekly meetings. His approach was entirely one of reason, but there is no evidence that his apologies had any affect on emperors.

Such apologies were powerful statement of reason, but in focusing on the mind, the heart and soul began to be lost. Today, many Christian groups have returned to more emotional and spiritual approaches to the Gospel, but it seems that every group is imbalanced in some direction. Some emphasize reason over emotion, others emotion over reason. What is really needed is a return to the balanced evangelism evident in the New Testament

There are few words in Christian vocabulary that are as emotionally-charged, both inside and outside the church, as evangelism. In today's politically correct world, many Christians view sharing their faith as intrusive. One of my own relatives once told me, "we should allow people to believe what they want to." But even a cursory reading of the New Testament clearly shows that evangelism is not an optional activity.

There are many ways to evangelize, and I don't think the Bible suggests we are all supposed to be biblical scholars capable of detailed apologetics. Nor do we all have an emotional story of conversion from degradation. But each of us has been given his and her own gifts, and when we fail to exercise these, we fail the test of discipleship.

CONCLUSION

Don't let me or anyone else tell you what is necessary for your salvation. As Paul wrote, "*work out your salvation with fear and trembling...*" (Philippians 2:12b). Be like the Bereans who were said to be "*more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.*" (Acts 17:11)

If you are seeking an escape from enslavement to sin and want to develop a relationship with God, Jesus is the answer, and He and the inspired writers of the New Testament have explained God's Grace and how you can receive it. Get into the Word and get with other Bible-believing Christians to find the answers.

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

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