

511 What Must I Do to Be Saved? God's Answers to Life's Questions

If you listen to preachers on the radio and television, they might tell you all kinds of things to do to be saved. Some will tell you to place your hand on the radio; some will lead you in a short prayer; some say you should ask Jesus into your life; and some will tell you that you don't need to do anything, because God will do it for you. The question we always need to ask is, "What does the Bible say?" What must we do to be saved according to the Bible? We know that if we do what the Bible says, we'll be listening to God.

People need to be saved. Some people think that sin is an "outdated" word that should be taken out of our vocabulary. But Paul said in Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." He further revealed in Rom. 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin causes all of us to lose our relationship with God. Isa. 59:1-2 says, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."

Sin, if unforgiven, will cause to be lost eternally. This is why we need the forgiveness of God. Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from sin. We are saved by the blood Jesus shed for us on the cross. He paid the price of death for our sin, that we might live. 1 Peter 2:24-25 says, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

The salvation in Christ is a gift from God. We didn't earn it; God didn't owe it to us; and we are blessed to have God's grace. Paul said in Eph. 2:8-10, "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. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." This passage does not say we are saved by "grace alone" or by "faith alone." It says we are saved by grace through faith. God saves us, yes, when we believe in Him by obeying the gospel.

Obeying the gospel is not some means by which we "earn" our salvation or obligate God to save us. It is how we meet the conditions God himself has laid down in order to receive His marvelous gift. Meeting God's conditions for salvation do not make His gift any less precious or any less a gift. In fact, it is only when we take His sacrifice seriously enough to do what ever He asks that we value His gift. If someone offered you a million dollars free of charge, if you came to his house to pick it up, you would not think coming to his house earned such a marvelous gift. Nor would you argue with your benefactor, because the gift far exceeded whatever effort you'd make.

So it is with our salvation. The precious blood of Jesus is more valuable than all the gold and silver in the world. You can't do enough to earn it or buy it. But if the Lord asks you to do something to receive it as a gift, why would you or anyone think twice about doing what the Lord asks?

Interestingly, each of the things God asks us to do to obey the gospel, He asks for our benefit, to bless our lives. He is not merely interested in cleaning us up; he wants to transform our lives for the better. He wants us to be born again to a new life, free from sin and wanting to do good.

The first thing one must do to be saved is to listen to the Word of God. Paul said in Rom. 10:17, "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Hearing is not always easy, when so many voices are speaking. The devil would love to confuse us or

keep us from hearing the Word altogether. In Luke 8:11-12, Jesus explains part of the parable of the sower this way, "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved." Sometimes hard hearts fail to hear God's Word.

Then we must also know that the devil loves to deceive and provides counterfeits. Paul worried about the Corinthians and said, "I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully" (2 Cor. 11:3-4). This is why we must each one look into the Bible for ourselves and study what the Word actually says.

Second, we must believe. Hebrews 11:6 says, "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." Faith is trust in God and in what He promises. We need to believe our seeking after him matters.

Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Faith or trust means that we are willing to put our souls in His hands, to trust Him with all our hearts and be willing to serve Him unconditionally.

Third, the Lord asks to change our hearts and lives in repentance. Jesus told a short parable in Matthew 21:28-31 demonstrating what repentance is. "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went. The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?"

Repentance is not only being sorry for what you did wrong, but changing your behavior so that you don't continue to do what you now believe is wrong. Jesus demands repentance. Jesus said in Luke 13:3, "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Repentance is not an option if we wish to live with God forever. Peter said in 2 Pet. 3:9, "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." God doesn't want anyone to be lost, not even the worst of sinners. But He expects those He saves to change their hearts and their ways. Many hate good and love evil. Paul said, "Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9). Repentance is that change of heart to hate evil.

Fourth, Jesus wants every person who comes to Him to confess Him before others. Confession is a public proclamation of faith in Jesus. Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven." ³³"But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33). Philip would not baptize the Eunuch until he professed his faith that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 8:36).

Fifth, a person must be baptized (immersed) in water to have the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 16:16 "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." In Acts 2:38, 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. Ananias told Saul in Acts

22:16, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”

Some people think baptism is a work; they reason that since we aren't saved by works, baptism is not necessary for salvation. Baptism is a work, but it is not a work of man. It is the work of God. It is an act of faith, letting God work on us. Col. 2:12-13 says, “having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.” God is the one who forgives us in baptism; God is the one who makes us alive with Him.

Paul said to Titus in 3:4-7, “But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” The washing of regeneration is baptism. In baptism God saves us, justifies us by His grace. Baptism is when the grace of God in the blood of Christ washes away our sins.

Now my college dictionary defines baptize: “to immerse in water or sprinkle or pour water on in the Christian rite of baptism.” But the word “baptize” is a transliteration of the Greek word “baptizo,” and means “to immerse or dip.” If the Bible had meant to sprinkle or pour, it would have used other Greek terms that mean that. When Philip baptized the Eunuch in Acts 8:38-39, “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.” Baptism happened after they went down into the water and before they came up out of it. As a practice sprinkling and pouring water for baptism didn't begin until the second or third century after Christ. The baptism of the New Testament was always immersion. Rom. 6:3-4 says, “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.” Baptism as a burial and resurrection unites us with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection in a way that sprinkling and pouring never can.

Devotion to God means listening and obeying Him. If the baptism of the New Testament is immersion, then be immersed rather than follow second and third century human traditions. The Hebrew writer said about Jesus, “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:8-9). Let's never be fooled into thinking that we can obey God the way we want. Loving God means listening to Him and pleasing Him.

Salvation is indeed by grace; it is the gift of God given to those who by love and faith are willing to respond to this gift in repentance and baptism. God saves us when we are baptized into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3) where the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin. The old man of sin is done away with, and a new man rises with Jesus to walk in newness of life. Wouldn't you like to have the forgiveness of sins and to walk in newness of life? Why not today decide to follow Jesus by believing in Him, repenting of your sins, and being baptized? It will be the most important and best decision you ever make.

John records a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3:3-7, Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born,

can he?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”

Jesus used words like “must” and “unless” in these passages. The words “truly, truly,” in the original language are “Amen, Amen.” Jesus meant what He said. Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Every ancient writer in the early church who referred to this passage understood it to be talking about baptism. Baptism is the washing of regeneration, the washing that regenerates or causes one to be born again. If Jesus felt so strongly about the need to be born again, which comes through faith, repentance, and baptism, then shouldn't we do as our Savior says?

Jesus paid a great price for our sins, and the gift of salvation is most precious. He offers it freely, when we obey Him out of love and faith. Salvation is too precious for us to accept this gift on our own terms. We need to accept it on the Lord's terms and do as He wills. We need the attitude of Jesus in our lives “not my will but Thine be done.” What are you waiting for? Why not obey the Lord today and accept His gracious gift of salvation?

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