

702 What Must I Do to be Saved?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

We are going to ask the most important question ever. Every other question is secondary and trivial. It is a question that will one day be the only question that has any relevance at all. "What must I do to be saved?" is that question. We cannot take such a question lightly, since both your soul and mine may hang in the balance of how we answer it. Paul told Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:16, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you." So we're going to pay close attention to what the Bible says about the matter.

Before I begin, let me point out that the Bible speaks of many things that affect our salvation. It would be a mistake if I were to take one of those items, isolate it from all the others and claim salvation upon only one of those items. I fear that some people do just that, and I do not want to lead anyone to disappointment in the presence of God. In this life, we live because of more than one thing: we breathe, we eat food, we drink water, and we have shelter from heat and cold. Take any one of these elements away, and I would surely perish. I could not live on just one of these alone for very long. You see it takes all these things to give me life. They are all essential and necessary.

As I ask the question, "What must I do to be saved?" there are some points that ought to be made. I want to speak about each word in this question, "What must I do to be saved?" First, There is a "what": there is something I must do. I have a responsibility before God for my actions. Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." We should never think that somehow or another God does not notice what we do in this life. God will one call us all to give an account for our lives and whether or not we have obeyed His will.

Second, there is a "must": if God Almighty says there are things I "must do" I cannot consider them optional, set them aside, or deviate from them. It would be folly to think that you are an exception or someone you know or love is an exception. The word "must" refers to a moral obligation before God. Even Jesus had such obligations: Luke 9:22 says, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day." Very honestly, there are some things I must do and cannot avoid if I am to be right with the living God. They are not optional. They are necessary for me to be saved and go to heaven.

Third, there is an "I": I have an obligation before God. I cannot pass this obligation off to any other person. No one can do this for me. The question is not what others have done or should do, the question is what must *I* do? If every other person on earth were lost, that doesn't give any reason why I should be. I still have a responsibility for me. If every other person on earth were saved, that wouldn't necessarily assure my salvation, were I to prove disobedient. I am the only one who can make a difference in my salvation. No one can do it for me, and I cannot do it for anyone else. I have to make the decision whether I will serve God or serve my self. My decision will affect eternity.

Fourth, there is a "do": the opinion of many is that one doesn't have to "do" anything to be saved, but Christianity is a faith filled with activity; it is a religion of practice, doing. Jesus said in Matt. 7:21 "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*." While it is true that no one can do anything to earn his salvation, that does not mean that there is nothing he must do

to comply with the will of God. Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus is the source of salvation to them that obey Him. Obedience shows our faith and our willingness to submit to God's will; it is not a means of earning our salvation.

Fifth, there is a "to be": the question is "what must I do to be saved" not what must I do to save myself. Yes, I must do something, but at the same time I understand that it is God who saves me, if I am saved at all. It is God's part to do the saving, the extending of his grace and forgiveness. It is my part to do what God demands of me, "what I must do," to receive this wonderful gift. We may be tempted to listen to the world's answers, but it is much wiser to listen to God's. If God is doing the saving, then we must pay close attention to what He says we must do. He after all is the Savior, and we are the saved. Let us give thanks that Jesus died for us so that we may "be saved."

Sixth, there is a "saved": Salvation is the goal. Going to heaven is more important than anything else. Paul said in 1 Tim. 2:3-4, "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." When we are saved, we are saved from sin, saved from being lost eternally, saved from the dominion of Satan, and transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, Jesus (Col. 1:13-14), which is the church! We were saved and redeemed to be a part of God's family on earth (the church) and to live as part of his family in heaven forever. There is no greater blessing in all of life than to be saved by the blood of Jesus.

This question, "what must I do to be saved" is asked three times in various forms in the book of Acts. I want us to look at them closely. The first time is in Acts 2. Peter had preached a sermon about the Lord Jesus. He proclaimed to these Jews in Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified, that they were responsible for his death. In Acts 2:36 Peter said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." Verse 37 says, "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?" These guilt-ridden people needed an answer to their sin.

They had awakened to the fact that Jesus arose from the dead and was their long-awaited Messiah. They wanted relief from their guilt. You might have felt guilt like that at some time. The answer Peter gave is one that is meaningful to you too! Peter said, "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." If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, what you need to do now is to repent and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins too can be forgiven.

Some people object to my saying that one must repent and be baptized before he is forgiven. They think that one is forgiven at the point of faith without baptism. But this view violates what they were asking. They were guilt ridden people looking for forgiveness, and Peter's answer tells them what to do to receive it, "repent and be baptized." Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. The New Revised Standard Version said, "be baptized...so that your sins may be forgiven." The International English Bible, translated in 2001 says the same thing. The new translation "God's Word," published in Nashville, says, "so that your sins will be forgiven." I don't know of any version, however, that says we are to be baptized because our sins are already forgiven. No, in every passage of the New Testament that contains a reference to baptism and salvation, the baptism always

comes first. Acts 2:40-41 says, "And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved (or save yourselves) from this perverse generation!' So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." You see, Peter was not exhorting them to do things because they were already saved; he was exhorting them to repent and be baptized in order to get saved. They still needed to do something to be saved.

In Acts 9 and Acts 22, the Bible speaks of Saul of Tarsus going to Damascus to imprison followers of Christ. Saul was persecuting every Christian he could find. About noontime as Saul journeyed a light from heaven shown down upon him and blinded. Saul asked, "Lord, what shall I do?" Jesus himself told Saul to go into Damascus, and there it would be told him what it has been appointed for him to do. Acts 9:6 says that he was to be told what he "must" do. Saul, was led into Damascus and for three days did not eat or drink anything (Acts 9:9). Verse 11 tells us that he spent his time there praying. After that a man named Ananias came to Saul to tell him what he must do.

Saul of Tarsus did not believe that Jesus was the Christ and did everything in his power to stop Christianity. When the Lord himself appeared to Saul, Saul realized that he was wrong. This was no small matter. He needed forgiveness for his persecution of Christ and his church. Acts 22:13-16 says: Ananias "came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him." Ananias didn't call him "brother" because he was a Christian but because he was a fellow Jew, and Jews called each other brethren (as Peter did on Pentecost). Saul was very anxious; Ananias had finally come to him to tell him what he must do.

And he said, "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will 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.' (Acts 22:14-16). This man had seen Jesus and spoke to Him, but that didn't wash away his sins. This man had spent three days fasting and praying, but that didn't wash away his sins. He needed to be told what he "must do." Ananias told the new believer who had spent three days repenting, "Get up and be baptized and wash away your sins." Saul still had sins and needed cleansing.

Now, if someone told me, get up and wash your clothes, I would assume that my clothes were dirty and needed washing. At our house we wash dirty clothes not clean ones. If Saul was saved before he was baptized, then what Ananias told him doesn't make sense. But Saul of Tarsus still had a dirty soul, stained with sin that needed washing. That's what he needed to hear. Saul knew that people were forgiven in baptism; that's why Ananias asked, "What are you waiting for?" Saul didn't need to keep praying or fasting; he needed to obey Ananias by getting up and being baptized to wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. My friend, what are you waiting for?

People put off their obedience to the Lord for a lot of reasons. My friend, don't put off obedience to the Lord until it's too late. You

may keep saying no to the Lord until your heart becomes so hard that you no longer have any room in your life for the Lord at all. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ who died for your sins and arose from the dead, why not also repent from your sins. Repentance is a change of heart and mind that leads to a change of behavior. Repentance is the hard part of obeying the gospel because it demands that we change our thinking and our actions, to leave an old way of life and start a new beginning devoted to the will and the way of the Lord Jesus.

With our faith and repentance, because we love the Lord, we must also be baptized. Jesus said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). He also said in John 3:5, "Truly, truly (Amen, Amen), I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." In verse 7 he says, "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" Paul himself said, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27). Baptism is an act of faith whereby we clothe ourselves with Christ.

Before we are baptized, we are without Christ; but in baptism we clothe ourselves with Christ and become one with Him. We have the forgiveness of our sins. It is in Christ that our sins are washed away by his blood, and baptism is into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). My friend if you have believed and repented, what are you waiting for? Why not today, have your sins washed away in the blood of Christ by being baptized into Christ, into His death. We hope you'll go today and do that very thing. Don't put it off; you do not know about tomorrow.

If you would like to know more about baptism, go to our website: tv.God-answers.org and look under the transcripts. At the bottom of the page is a free article on baptism and Acts 2:38. If you don't have access to the internet, write me and I'll send you one free. Baptism is necessary to salvation, but only a baptism that is accompanied with faith, love and repentance. Baptizing an unbeliever does no good, just as baptizing a person who will not repent does no good. But thinking that a penitent person who has not been baptized is nevertheless saved is also a false notion. Just as it takes air, food, water and shelter to preserve our lives, so it takes more than just faith to be saved.

It takes faith plus love plus repentance plus baptism. All are necessary. And the baptism of Christians is baptism in water in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven. I can't imagine trusting in an optional plan. These things are "musts." I want to do what I can see clearly taught in the New Testament. I don't want to gamble the most important thing I possess on a plan that varies from Scripture. Doing things the way Bible teaches is the way one says to God, "I love You enough to take You and Your Word seriously." When we consider all that Jesus did for us, shouldn't we make every effort to obey Him and do things the way the Bible teaches?

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