

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

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This question, What must I do to be saved? is the most vital, momentous and far-reaching query ever propounded by man. It is of the greatest importance, both for time and eternity, that it is answered, answered in each generation, answered for every responsible being, answered correctly. It is a question involving the soul's chiefest interests and is personal, pertinent and urgent to all of every race and clime and country. It is possible to receive answers thereto which are deceptive, delusive, and misleading—answers which serve merely to deepen the gloom and enshroud the mind and make more certain the soul's eventual ruin.

The implications of the question are very obvious. He who raises it is lost; he knows he is lost; he desires salvation; and he understands that there is something he must do obtain it. Only when these considerations obtain is one in proper position to receive the answer. He who is not aware that he is lost feels no need of salvation. One may be lost and not know it, or lost and knowing it, may not desire salvation, or desiring salvation, may be under the impression that there is nothing such a one can do to obtain it.

All accountable beings are lost who have not had applied to them the cleansing blood of the Lamb and, lost, are separated from God. In the long ago, the prophet declared, **"Behold, Jehovah's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear."** (Isa. 59:1-2). This, indeed, is the condition characteristic of every unsaved, responsible person in the world—separated from God and all that is good—in a state of alienation from the Creator. Into this condition one automatically passes on reaching the period of accountability—the age when one knows or is capable of knowing right from wrong—and there remains until death and spiritual destruction remove forever the period of probation this life affords, unless one hears and heeds the proper answer to the question above propounded.

When it is affirmed that one must do something in order to be saved, it is not intended to imply that man can save himself or, through meritorious works earn salvation, thus excluding all divine assistance. Man is lost in a sense in which he cannot save himself, in a sense in which no other man can save him and, therefore, in a sense in which, if saved at all, it must be God's goodness and grace. This is the divine side of salvation. We neither minimize nor disparage this fact when we also assert that man is lost in a sense in which he can save himself; in a sense in which God will not do it; in a sense in which no other man can do it and, therefore, in a sense in which, if saved at all, man must do it! Peter, on Pentecost, urged his hearers to **"save yourselves from this crooked generation,"** (Acts 2:40), and Paul taught the Philippians to **"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,"** (Phil. 2:12). John warned, **"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected."** (1 John 2:4-5).

It follows, therefore, that what one must do to obtain salvation is to comply with the will of God on the basis of which salvation is offered. This, indeed, is that which distinguishes between the saved and the lost. The former are those who do his will and the latter are those who do not. To the rebellious Jews, our Lord said, "**Ye will not come to me that ye may have life.**" (John 5:40). Thus to be saved we must do the Lord's will. The Lord's will is expressed in his commandments. We must then keep his commandments. When the young ruler inquired, "**Teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?**" our Lord answered, "**If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments.**" (Matt. 19:17). The statement of the Saviour is clear, simple, and without ambiguity. How may one enter into life? Keep the commandments. There is, for responsible people, no other way. If to our Lord we concede the power and privilege of specifying the conditions precedent to the forgiveness of sins, one must keep the commandments.

What Commandments?

This we may easily ascertain by noting what men, desirous of obtaining salvation, were required to do by those inspired of the Spirit in the early ages of the church. Paul and Silas at the midnight hour in the jail in Philippi, and in response to the query propounded by their captor, "**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**" replied, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house.**" (Acts 16:30-31). Inasmuch as faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17), and the jailer could not comply with the obligation to believe until the word was preached, it was not surprising that they "**spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house.**" This done, he was ready to complete his obedience, and we are informed that, "**the same hour of the night**" he "**was baptized, he and all of his, immediately,...and rejoiced greatly, with all of his house, having believed in God.**" It is noteworthy that his baptism followed belief, and following both, he rejoiced greatly, because only after both did he enjoy salvation. Jesus said, "**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.**" (Mark 16:16).

The order of events is significant:

1. He was required to believe;
2. his was possible only after the word was preached;
3. through the preaching of the word he was offered the forgiveness of sins;
4. his forgiveness was conditioned on both belief and baptism;
5. following baptism, he rejoiced greatly. Only after they completed their obedience in baptism did men rejoice because of sins forgiven in the days of inspiration.

A similar query was raised on the day of the establishment of the church and the first public proclamation of the great commission. Present on that occasion who fifty and three days before had participated in the crucifixion of the Lord of glory.

Convinced of their great guilt by the powerful preaching of Peter, they were cut to the heart and cried out saying, "**Brethren, what shall we do?**" Do for what? Obtain the remission of sins, we may well assume, inasmuch as this was the impression which Peter received, and this is that which he proceeded to explain to them: "**Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**" (Acts 2:38). Already believers, as evidenced by their alarmed cry and anxious query, it remained for them to repent and be baptized unto the remission of sins. Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines the preposition unto to mean "*in respect of an unreachd end,*" i.e., repent and be baptized to reach an unreachd end. What, in this instance, is the unreachd end? Remission of sins. How may it be reachd by those already believers? "**Repent...and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.**"

To Saul of Tarsus, who had already believed, repented and publicly confessed Christ (Acts 22:3-16), a gospel preacher said, "**And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name.**"

In the three instances adduced it has been seen that sinners inquired what to do to be saved of inspired men and the answers given were by inspiration. Those who have done nothing must first believe and then complete their obedience through repentance, confession and baptism, as in the case of the jailer. Those who have believed—as had the Pentecostians—need to complete their obedience by repenting and being baptized. Those in the position of Saul who have already believed, repented and confessed faith in Christ are merely required to "**arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins.**"

Reader, at what point are you in God's plan?