

Great Questions of the Bible: “What Must I Do To Be Saved?”

We, who believe the Bible, look to it as a book of answers, but it's also a book full of questions. Deep and consequential questions. How we answer those questions directly affects where we will spend eternity. There are some very powerful questions that were asked and then written down by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the scriptures, and we learn a great deal from them. Would you believe that there is a question recorded in the Bible that even some preachers today take issue with? And were the people who asked the question long ago alive today, and were they to ask some of the modern day preachers the very same question, they might even be rebuked for asking it. But how can one go wrong asking a question that is recorded in scripture and plainly answered by the scripture? Friend, this is a crucial question, and if you've never asked it and investigated the word of God to find its answer, you need to. No question will have any more bearing on where you will live in eternity. It is not only a question you need to *ask*, but more importantly, you must find a Bible *answer* to.

Acts 16:25-30 “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas. And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Friends, this is a Bible question, sanctioned by an answer from the Holy Spirit. Let's look together for a little while today, at how God answered the question when it was asked. As we do, I hope you'll consider your own soul, and why you believe you have or have not been saved. You might be surprised at what the scriptures actually teach.

There is a good possibility that, as I speak to you today about this great question of the Bible, you might be thinking, well, that's a good question for him to ask of somebody else because I'm already saved. But may I challenge you to give that some sincere and serious thought. What were you told when you first asked this question? Or, maybe you know you're lost and without Jesus Christ, and you're searching, or at least you're curious enough to have listened to the television program, and you can genuinely ask--perhaps for the first time in your life: What must I do to be saved?

Some will immediately dismiss the question because of the words *must*, *I* and *do*, saying that there's no human involvement in salvation; that it's wholly predestined, procured, proclaimed and received by the working of God alone, and that man is simply passive in the process. The popular theological system known as 'Calvinism' (named for reformer John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian church) promotes this idea. But for most who would ask this question of those who would answer it, let me give you a few of the more popular answers today.

Sometimes people are convinced of their need for salvation after watching a preacher on television or listening to him on the radio, and what usually happens is that the preacher will ask his listeners to accept Jesus into their hearts to be saved. He might say something like this: “Wherever you are right now, just stop what you're doing and put your hand on the television screen or radio and bow your head and say this simple prayer...” He will lead the sinner in a prayer asking Jesus to come into his heart and

save him right there. When that prayer is finished, the preacher will tell the viewer that he has just been saved and born again, forgiven of all of his sins, and that he can now begin living the Christian life and locate a church somewhere to join.

In many denominational services, they have what is referred to as an 'altar call.' Maybe you've had an experience like this. The preacher invites anyone who wants to be saved to come to the altar at the front and pray with him. Perhaps he'll have some bow their heads where they are as he leads the respondents in what he calls 'the sinner's prayer.' Then he'll ask those who prayed that prayer with him to perhaps raise their hand or sign a card, and if baptism is even involved, it's usually at some later time when several are baptized upon admission into that particular denomination, or to have the person's name added to the church roll.

Well, does that sound familiar? Is that how YOU believe that you were saved? I hope you'll listen very carefully as we read what happened on three occasions in the New Testament where people wanted to be saved, and they asked, "What must I do to be saved?" See if that's what happened to them, or if that's what these people were told to do when they asked the question.

First of all, let's go to **Acts 2**. Mark these verses in your Bible and pay close attention to what they say. This passage records what happened on the Day of Pentecost, which was a feast day of the Jews, which drew thousands upon thousands of people from around the world to the city of Jerusalem. It was about fifty days after Jesus was crucified and resurrected, and the Lord chose this day to establish His church and set up His kingdom in the hearts of men. When Jesus ascended back to heaven, He told His twelve apostles to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit fell on them and gave them the power they would need to begin preaching the gospel of salvation.

The apostles were gathered in an upper room, when suddenly, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, according to **Acts 2:1-4**. Now, they had the Spirit of God to guide them in the preaching of the truth. In the midst of all of this, a crowd gathers around and they witness the apostles as they are miraculously speaking in other languages and foreign tongues. Peter seized this opportunity to explain what had just happened and to preach the very first gospel sermon. It was a short but powerful sermon that, in fact, ignited a movement that continues today. He convincingly showed that Jesus Christ was the promised seed of David and the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Of course, just days before, this very angry mob to whom Peter was preaching had called for the death of Jesus. They had rejected Him and angrily delivered Him to the Romans, demanding that He be executed for the blasphemy of claiming to be God. But here, Peter undeniably demonstrates that Jesus was INDEED the Christ.

Acts 2:23 " ...ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:"

Acts 2:36 "...that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

When Peter said that, the truth of the Holy Spirit did its work, and penetrated their cold and callous hearts. They knew they had done a wicked thing and were sinners in the sight of God. They had rejected their Messiah and now, they wanted to accept Him. So, they interrupted Peter in the midst of his sermon.

Acts 2:37 “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

In other words, “What must we do to be saved?” There it is, you see. They were ready to listen to whatever God said. They were seeking and inquiring about salvation. They believed that Peter was speaking by divine authority and they wanted to know right then what they had to do to be saved.

Well, Peter didn’t rebuke them for asking the question. He didn’t say, “Don’t you understand? There’s nothing you can do to be saved? If you’ve been elected of God, the Holy Spirit will bring you to salvation. There’s nothing for you to *do*. Don’t you know that salvation is by grace alone and there’s nothing man *does* involved in his salvation?”

But that’s NOT how Peter responded. Since Peter was guided by the Holy Spirit, shouldn’t his answer to them tell us what we must do to be saved as well? Listen to his answer.

Acts 2:38-40 “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”

Now, is that what you expected Peter to say? Is that what your preacher said when you asked what you had to do to be saved? Did he tell you to repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins, or did he say to just accept Jesus into your heart? Friend, it’s clear that these people already believed in Jesus as the Christ, so Peter gives them two commandments that they needed to obey: they needed to turn from their sins in repentance, then be baptized for the remission or forgiveness of their sins. Peter didn’t say to repent and be saved, and you can be baptized later if you want to. He *joined* these two terms of the gospel together and made them both a condition of receiving the forgiveness of sins.

I want you to listen to me very carefully: Baptism is just as essential as repentance. And if a man can be saved without being baptized for the remission of his sins, then he can be saved without repenting of his sins. Who can believe that man can be saved without repenting of his sins? Read what Jesus said about it:

Luke 13:3 “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

You’ll perish, Jesus said, if you don’t repent. Well, here in **Acts 2:38**, Peter joins repentance *and* baptism, and says that this is what to do when these people asked him what to do in order to be saved and receive the forgiveness of sins.

When Jesus was with His disciples after His resurrection, and He gave them what we call “the great commission,” Jesus told them what to preach.

Mark 16:15 “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

Well, what were they supposed to preach? Jesus tells them.

Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

So, Jesus had already made known the condition upon which a man would be saved. He told these disciples to go and preach, to believe and be baptized. These people on Pentecost believed. A sinner must believe in Him, repent of his sinful way of living—Peter tells them to repent—and be baptized or immersed in order to be saved. Peter is simply preaching what Jesus told him and the other apostles to preach when they went forth publishing the gospel of the kingdom.

Now, why don't men preach that today? Where do they get this idea of a sinner's prayer? Peter didn't know anything about a sinner's prayer. He preached just what Jesus told him to preach, and told those believing sinners to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins.

So, how did they respond when Peter answered their question?

Acts 2:41 “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”

They didn't argue with Peter, they didn't try to get around the commandment or wait to do what he said to do. They gladly complied with Peter's inspired teaching and that day they were baptized and thus were added to the number of the disciples. Meaning, according to **verse 47**, that the Lord added them to the church. They didn't go out later and join a church. The Lord adds the saved to HIS church when they are saved, when they comply with the gospel terms of salvation and thus, become *in Christ* and called out of the world and into a new relationship with the Lord. By essence of that very fact, they are added to the number of the saved, to the church.

I want to give you a challenge today: Ask your preacher if he believes that baptism is *for* the remission of sins. You be careful how you word that. Don't ask him if he believes that baptism is *because* of the remission of sins. Ask him if, according to **Acts 2**, baptism is *for* the remission of sins. See if he's giving you the same answer that Peter did on the Day of Pentecost.

Now let's turn over to **Acts 9**. Recorded here is the famous conversion of the apostle Paul from Judaism to Christianity. He was known as Saul before his conversion to Christ. His name caused terror to sweep through the church in those days. Saul was a leader among the Jewish opposition to Christianity, and he and his cohorts were going through the land doing everything they could to tear the church apart and stamp it out of existence. They were putting Christians to death, and when we come to **Acts 9**, Saul was going to Damascus to find more Christians to bring back to Jerusalem as prisoners and possibly be killed. He was a dreadful character who despised the very name of Jesus Christ, and considered Him Public Enemy #1.

But, my, how his life would change on that last trip to Damascus. He was getting close to the city when he was stopped dead in his tracks on the Damascus road. A blinding light shined down from heaven and put Saul on the ground. He heard a voice from the heavens above, and it was Jesus, supernaturally speaking to him.

Acts 9:4-5 “And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

He told Saul, I'm the very Jesus whom you deny, whom you hate, Saul! Well, that was enough to convince Saul that he was on the wrong mission. He was fighting against the Son of God, and

he was trying to destroy a worthy movement. His pride and his arrogance turned to shame and humility there on the Damascus road, and he asked the Lord a question.

Acts 9:6 “And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

Now, I want to stop right here and notice something very important. Saul is having a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, and the Lord did something here that He didn't do to any other sinner in the New Testament. He personally appears to Saul, and there's a reason for that. He knows that Saul is going to become something great in His cause: an apostle. And one of the qualifications of being an apostle was that one had to be a witness of Jesus Christ after His resurrection. An apostle had to have *seen* the Lord. So, the Lord arranged for that by appearing to Saul on the Damascus road.

The Lord isn't trying to make apostles out of you or me or anyone else today, so He doesn't confront people in that way today like He did Saul back then. He convicts men of their sin now by the preaching of the gospel. If someone today were to claim that they had met the Lord Jesus or that He spoke to them, you might assume that that person is saved. I mean, wouldn't you assume that once Saul met Jesus on the Damascus road that he was now a Christian, that he was now saved? Who could have such an encounter and *not* be saved? Well, Saul wasn't, and I'll show you why.

Ephesians 1:13 “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation...”

So, you see, a person must *hear the gospel* before he/she can trust its precepts and obtain its blessings. Salvation doesn't come through 'better felt than told' experiences, personal encounters with Jesus, angels or the Holy Spirit. Salvation is the result of having our hearts changed by the preaching of the gospel of the Holy Spirit, and yielding to its teachings.

Now, if the modern ideas that some have about salvation are true, Saul could've been saved by Jesus right there on the Damascus road when he met Him face to face. But if Saul was saved at this point, he didn't know it. That's just not how it happened. Look closely at what Jesus said when Saul asked Him what Jesus would have him do.

Acts 9:6 “...and the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”

So Saul had to be saved just like every other person: he had to hear the gospel and obey it. Well, Saul gets up and opens his eyes, but he's blind. So, they led him by the hand into the city where he waited for three days for a preacher to come visit him. The Lord had a man there by the name of Ananias, and God told Ananias to go down to where Saul was staying and talk to him, because he was praying and trying to find salvation. Ananias follows the Lord's command, goes down to the house where Saul was, lays his hands on him and restores his sight. And listen to what the scripture says next.

Acts 9:18 “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.”

Not six months later; he arose *that day* and was baptized when Ananias came to him to tell him according to Jesus what he must do.

Now let's review that. Saul asked Jesus, what shall I do? What must I do? What wilt thou have me do? The Lord tells him to go into Damascus and wait for Ananias to come and tell him what to do. Ananias comes to him, restores his vision, and what happened? Immediately, Saul gets up and is baptized. Do you suppose Ananias told him what Jesus said in the great commission?

Mark 16:15-16 "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Well, we don't have to wonder. Let's look and see. In **Acts 22:16**, the apostle Paul is telling some folks there about how he was saved, what happened in Damascus when he was saved that day. This is what Paul said he was told by Ananias.

Acts 22:16 "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

That sounds like what Peter said to the people on Pentecost, doesn't it? Remember, Peter said, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins."* Now, Ananias tells Saul, who now believes and is remorseful and has no doubt resolved to follow Jesus in repentance, *"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins."* Isn't the *"washing away"* of sins synonymous with the *"forgiveness of sins?"* If I'm cleansed of my sins, washed of my sins, I'm forgiven of my sins and am free of my sins. He's told to arise and be baptized in order to have his sins washed away. So, here's another time when the question is asked and answered the same way.

The third occasion is recorded in **Acts 16:25-33**. Paul and his preaching companion, Silas, had been thrown into jail and a Philippian guard was told to keep watch. It was just any other night in this jail, and Paul and Silas were just two more prisoners, except something was different: they were chained in their cell and singing songs of praise to God and praying, the Bible says. The jailer was a captive audience, and I suppose he was quietly listening to them as they sang and prayed well into the night.

At about midnight, something amazing happened: the ground began to shake and God caused an earthquake to knock loose the doors of the prison. When it all stopped, the jailer just knew that all of the prisoners had fled into the night, and he, being responsible for them, would be executed for letting them get away.

Acts 16:28 "But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here."

The jailer was moved by the power of God and was touched by the piety of Paul and Silas, and he called for a light, and fell trembling in front of Paul and asked this question:

Acts 16:30 "And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Here again, this man realized his sinful condition. He knew there was something he must do to be saved. Paul didn't rebuke him for asking such a question. Rather, he told him this:

Acts 16:31 "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

But that's not where he leaves it.

Acts 16:32-33 "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway."

Not a month later, not six months later, not even a week later. *The same hour of the night, straightway*, he and his house were baptized. There's a Bible example.

I want to ask you something: if baptism is unessential and in no way connected to a person's responding in faith to the grace of God and being saved, why was he baptized *the same hour of the night*? Why would he have been baptized in the midnight hour? Why not do just like churches and denominations and preachers do today, and make baptism an optional church ordinance that he could attend to later, after he became a Christian? Why did they go that *same hour of the night*? I'll tell you why: because when Jesus told the apostles to go and preach the gospel, he told them that "*he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*" Because baptism is for the remission of sins. Because, as Saul was told, "*Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" That's the Bible answer to the Bible question, what must I do to be saved?