

# God's Plan of Salvation

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## Steps of the Plan of Salvation

Enumerating the "steps" of salvation are done reluctantly for fear of trivializing what God really wants from us, which is nothing short of *everything* (Rom. 12:1-2). Each of the steps is quite profound, and each is designed to bring us to the point where we will be able to state as the apostle Paul did: "For me to live is Christ..." (Phil. 1:21).

As an overview, consider these verses about each of the following:

- (1) hearing -- Jn. 6:44-45, Ro 10:14,17
- (2) believing -- Jn. 3:16 ;8:24; Acts 16:31; Rom 5:1; Heb 11:6
- (3) repentance -- Lk. 13:1-5; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; 17:30; 2 Cor 7:10
- (4) confession of our faith in him -- Mt. 10:32-33; Lk 9:26; Acts 8:36-37; Rom 10:9-10
- (5) being baptized -- Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:36; 22:16; 1 Pe 3:21
- (6) being faithful unto death -- Mt 7:21; 10:22; Heb 5:9; 1 John 2:4; Rev. 2:10

Each of these verses states a condition. The examples of conversion that we have in the book of Acts enables us to see how these form the New Testament pattern.

However, what does it mean to *hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized and be faithful unto death*? These questions will be addressed. One aspect of this question can be answered immediately: these are *not* works whereby we merit our salvation. It is the blood of Christ and that alone that purchases our salvation (Acts 20:28; Rev. 5:9). No works of our own hands can ever atone for our sins (Eph. 2:8; Tit. 3:5). We certainly cannot compare our part of salvation with the sacrifice of the perfect Son of God on the cross. And, the more we sacrifice ourselves, the more we receive of the *abundant life* which Jesus promised his followers (Luke 18:29-30). In light of this, we can understand that, truly, salvation is a free gift of God.

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There is a simple principle of language that many of us contently use, but overlook in scripture. It is called synecdoche. It means: the part represents the whole. We use synecdoche all the time in English. The following are examples:

- 1) "Bless your heart" = We don't mean bless the organ that pumps your blood. We mean "Bless all of you." The part represents the whole. The heart represents the whole person.
- 2) "It's good to see your face" = "It's good to see YOU, all of you"
- 3) "Bless the hands that prepared this food" = "Bless ALL of you"
- 4) "I like your wheels" = "I like your whole car"
- 5) "Let's do a head count" = "Let's count all the people" to include their bodies

6) "I have 100 head of cattle" = "I have 100 whole cows"

We use synecdoche all the time. It's like second nature.

It is also used in the Bible like this. When the N.T. writers speak of being saved by believing, they are using "believe" synecdochally. The term "believe" represents the whole response to the gospel. The emphasis he is trying to make in the context decides which term he uses. Sometimes he speaks of being saved by repentance (2 Pet. 3:9) but repentance is representative of the WHOLE response to the gospel to include faith, baptism, and being faithful. Baptism is used synecdochally in 1 Pet. 3:21 and "believe" in places like Acts 16:31. But it is apparent that "believe" is used in a representative way in this verse because the jailer was baptized the same hour of the night. Confessing is used in Romans 10:9-10 along with belief.

It is utterly absurd to expect the N.T. writers to write down every single faith-response to the gospel every time they talk about it. But WHATEVER they wrote, whether believe, repent, baptism, works, confess - - ALL were representative of the WHOLE response to the gospel. The hearers understood this.

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## Plan of Salvation (1) - Hearing

It has been said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first small step. While first, the step of *hearing* the word of God is far from small. This might well be the most important step toward becoming a child of God, for *without this step there can be no others*.

Let us first establish that *hearing* God's word is a condition of salvation. In John 6:44, Jesus stated: <sup>44</sup>"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." Note first that this *is* a condition of salvation: <sup>44</sup>"No one can come to Me, unless ... and I will raise him up on the last day." Now, what does it mean that the "Father ... draws him?" This is explained by the quotation (in verse 45) of Isaiah 54:13: "AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD." Many think that this implies some miraculous impartation of knowledge. However, the verse goes on to explain this in very natural terms: "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me" This is not necessarily miraculous, since we all can hear and learn of God from His written word.

The importance of hearing is further impressed on us by Romans 10:17, which is the only verse that we know which tells us specifically how to acquire faith: <sup>17</sup>"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Most religious people know that faith is an important aspect of our relationship with God. However, do they understand what we must hear in order that we may receive "a faith of the same kind as ours" (2 Pet. 1:1) that was held by the apostles?

Think about the fate of those who *refuse* to hear. How can they believe? How can they ever come to repentance? Now, consider those who readily hear, but hear the wrong thing? What will their faith be based on? They might make tremendous sacrifices, but whom would it be for?

This does not mean that before a sinner can come to Christ he must have a full intellectual understanding of all the facets and nuances of Christ. His knowledge may be very embryonic. However, it must be true knowledge. He must perceive that in ways he does not understand, Jesus is his Savior and his only hope. The revelation of saving truth is always in the gospel, as found in the Scriptures, never through our own freewheeling speculations.

Therefore, while a repentant soul's salvation does not hinge on being able to recite some particular creedal dogma word for word, or display a thorough understanding of it. Nevertheless there must be something in the mind to be believed, and that something must be truth. It cannot be fiction, myth, or superstition.

Jesus associated our salvation with knowing the truth, which is only possible by continuing in His word (John 8:31). How can the mind believe if the mind has no concept of what or who is to be believed? If knowing the truth is not important, then tossing a coin will do.

Jesus answered in John 8:32: <sup>31</sup>...*If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;* <sup>32</sup>*and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*" We control what we hear, and what we hear is of the greatest importance.

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## Have you ever heard it said?? . . .

*As long as we call Jesus "Lord," nothing else matters...* but Jesus said:

(Matthew 7:21-23):

<sup>21</sup>"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. <sup>22</sup>"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup>"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'

These were not immoral sinners; they were religious people. These were not liars; they *believed* what they said to the point that they were arguing with the Lord on the Day of Judgment. It appears that they even believed that they had performed miracles in his name.

Jesus said that we must do <sup>21</sup>...*the will of My Father who is in heaven.*" How do we know what the will of God is? This is given in the next verse: <sup>24</sup>"*Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock...*" It is essential that we hear (actually *listen*) to what God has revealed. This first step, learning the truth, is essential to doing God's will. "You are what you eat" holds much more in the spiritual realm than in the physical.

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## Plan of Salvation (2) - Faith

Of all of the conditions stated by Jesus, none is more accepted by the religious world, as is faith. And yet, it is not a well-understood concept. Just what is the saving faith required by Jesus?

Like love, faith is an abstract entity. It cannot exist as an end in itself. It motivates action. It cannot be contrasted with works, since it is essential to doing the works of God; it is impossible to have faith without works (James 2:17); and it is impossible to come to God without faith (Heb. 11:6). When Jesus was asked, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" he replied "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." (John 6:28-29). True faith is a work of God, since it is based on the revealed word of God: "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." (Rom. 10:17).

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## Faith -- What is it?

The point of belief isn't in the definition. A case can be made that the word "believe" means to "trust in, rely upon, adhere to." Even the Amplified shows this in many places where the word "believe" is used. The Greek word is "pisteuo" (believe) and pistis (faith). Inherent in the meaning of the word is the idea of "obey." To a Hebrew, to believe was to ACT, to obey. If one didn't obey, one didn't believe or have true faith.

To many people, faith is nothing but blind trust. When they cannot explain the reason for something, they assert: "You just have to have faith." Yet, in the New Testament saving faith is just the opposite of this. Consider the words of Paul: "...whatever is not from faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23). The context reveals that this is speaking of a conviction that is based on careful study and measured evaluation, not mere whim.

Exhorting his fellow Christians, Jude commanded: "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude 3). In this use of the word, faith refers to the *body of knowledge that is believed*. In addition, this "faith ... was ... delivered." It is not a matter of blindly following something of doubtful origin, but rather, contending earnestly for what was known to have been received.

Hebrews 11 starts out with the only bible definition of faith (to our knowledge): "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The "things hoped for," and the "things not seen" are one and the same, since Romans 8:24 states: "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope...". It seems quite clear that these are the promises of God, for what other unseen things are as important as God's promises.

Similarly, "assurance" and "conviction" are similar in meaning. Other versions apply such words as: substance, confidence, and evidence. The commonality of these words is that they convey a sense of what is reality. In other words, *even though we do not see the promises of God, they become reality to us through faith*.

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## Have you ever heard it said?? . . .

*We are saved by faith only . . .* but James said (James 2:24):

"You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone."

Note first that this in no way diminishes the role of faith in our salvation. Just the opposite: James *defines exactly what true and living faith is*, and this is exemplified throughout the Bible (see Hebrews 11). Never was a person saved by faith without that

faith exhibiting itself is some action (works/fruits/obedience). It is faith alone that saves, but the faith that saves is not alone. He who believes is he who obeys and he who obeys is he who believes.

James starts out by asking (vs. 14): "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" This question admits that such is impossible, and James goes on to state that demons have such faith (19). Raw belief is not enough; it must motivate action pleasing to God. So, James defines the two types of faith that can exist in verse 26: "For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

Jesus uses "believe" in negative parallel with "obey" in John 3:36 where he says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." This clearly shows that belief and obedience are two sides of the same coin. You simply could not have one without the other. Faith and obedience are one and the same concept.

The faith that we are saved by is *living* faith, not *dead* faith. Living faith will motivate us to accomplish the rest of the conditions that God has given, all of which proceed from faith. True and living faith will motivate us to do what God commands (Heb. 11; James 2:26). Faith in God and His word is essential, but it does not exist unless it provides this motivation (James 2:14f; Heb. 11:6). It is not the belief of the student studying a problem, but a drowning man grabbing a life-line, believing it will save him.

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## Plan of Salvation (3) - Repentance

Vine defines the most predominant Greek word for repentance as signifying: "...to change one's mind or purpose; always, in the NT, involving a change for the better, an amendment, and always, except in Luke 17:3-4, of 'repentance' from sin." This is not a temporary or one-time action. Once that change takes place it must *stay* in place; else we would repent of our repentance.

Like love and faith, repentance motivates action. It motivates us to hate sin and love righteousness, and thus it motivates us to flee from sin and to "bring forth fruit ... worthy of repentance."

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## Unless You Repent . . .

One day several people came to Jesus and, like each one of us, they were trying to justify themselves by comparing themselves to some really *bad* people (Luke 13:1f). They felt that because these other people had been punished so severely, they most certainly were wicked people.

Jesus response to them must have been quite surprising. He taught that they should not be concerned with others while they were not right with God. And so Jesus stated to them: <sup>13</sup> *I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*" He was telling them that they would find themselves in the same situation as the worst of sinners if they did not turn from their own sinful ways.

If such was a condition of salvation for these ordinary people, why would it not be for us? Is God a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34)? Indeed, when Peter was asked by the multitude to which he preached on the day of Pentecost, ("What shall we do?"), his response was quite definitive (Acts 2:38): <sup>38</sup> *And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins;..."*

The process of repentance is not easy, and for that reason it stands between many people and their salvation. In Romans 6:6, Paul compared repentance to a crucifixion: <sup>6</sup> *"... knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin;"*

The longer one goes without repentance, the more difficult this becomes. Think how difficult it would be to get to the end of your life and have to admit that you have been serving Satan. Perhaps literal crucifixion would be easier for many in this condition.

As we see in the rest of Romans 6 Paul does not describe this "crucifixion" as something that can be neglected once it is accomplished. Speaking to Christians, he implores: <sup>12</sup> *"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts,"* As Christians we have dedicated ourselves to be living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1). We will sin (1 Jn. 1:8f). But, we should fight that sin with every fiber of our being, knowing that God has something much better than sin prepared for us. Read Hebrews 11:40 and 12:1 to see just what that is.

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## Have you ever heard it said?? . . .

*You must repent . . .* but John the Baptist commanded (Matthew 3:8):

<sup>8</sup> *"Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance;"*

Technically, the first statement is accurate; however, John the Baptist's statement implies that it might not go far enough.

Most people are honest enough to be able to look back in sorrow at some consequences that they have had to suffer because of their own sin. Consequences always produce a type of sorrow. The person who robs the local store and gets caught is sorry that he ever conceived of the plan. But this is a sorrow for getting caught, not one motivated by a genuine desire to change.

John goes on to tell them not to take pride in their heritage. They would not be able to practice business as usual if they were going to be ready for the Messiah. We find them rejecting John's rebuke, and eventually they were not even able to comprehend what Jesus was all about (see Mt. 13:10-17).

Repentance is a most painful process, and the longer we put it off, the more painful it becomes. Yet, when we allow God's word to work in us we learn what Jesus meant by a "light yoke" (Mt. 11:28) and Paul by "...the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension," (Phil. 4:7).

Repentance is a *turning away* from sin as a result of godly sorrow; confession is its positive counterpart.

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# Plan of Salvation (4) - Confession

The Greek word for confession as used in Mt. 10:32 is *homologeō*, which Vine defines literally as "to speak the same thing" (homos, "same," lego, "to speak"); and further, "to declare openly by way of speaking out freely, such confession being the effect of deep conviction of facts." This definition will hold for all of the contexts discussed here.

In these contexts, confession does *not* hold its modern religious connotation of confessing one's *sins* to a priest (or anyone else). Confession of sins is discussed in scripture (e.g., 1 John 1:9 and James 5:16). However, the confession that is under discussion here is referring to a person's willingness to state by word and deed, emphatically and publicly, that Jesus is the Son of God.

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## If You Confess . . .

There are two common errors made regarding the biblical teachings on confession:

- (1) denying its importance
- (2) jumping to salvation by "confession only."

*Neither of these extreme positions is correct.*

Mt. 10:32 Jesus said: **"Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.** This alone makes confession a condition of salvation.

The confession of Christ was not a trivial statement in the first century as it could be in many of our societies where we have freedom of religion. There were consequences both before and after the death of Jesus for confessing him (Jn. 9:22; 12:42; Acts 22:19).

Confession as a condition of salvation is further taught in Rom. 10:9: "... that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved."

We see from the examples given in the book of Acts that all converts had a willingness to confess Christ. In Acts 8:37 there is an explicit example of confession prior to baptism. However, confession is *not* a one-time act; it is a *way of life* (1 Jn 4:15): "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God."

Our words, our deeds and everything that we are and stand for as Christians must be a confession of Christ. Thus, the concept of salvation by "confession only" is as easily dispelled as is salvation by "faith only" (James 2:26). Just as faith cannot exist apart from the works that it motivates, so confession cannot exist in word only.

The confession of Christ also encompasses *all* that he taught. Speaking of those who once were faithful Christians, John states (2 Jn 1:7): "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist." Apparently these false teachers acknowledged

some form of "Jesus Christ" but refused to teach that he came in the flesh. *Doctrine is important* (Mt. 4:4).

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## Have you ever heard it said?? . . .

*It does not matter if you accept Christ . . . but Jesus said (John 14:6):*

**"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."**

Jesus was describing the way to his Father's house. He had told them that: **"... you know the way where I am going"** (Jn. 14:4). Thomas asked him "... how do we know the way?" It was then that Jesus stated: **"I am the way..."**

We can and should *know* the way to God's eternal dwelling place for us. Jesus has defined the way by his perfect life (Heb. 1:1f), by sending the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles (Jn. 16:13), and by the words that the inspired men wrote as a result of this inspiration (1 Cor. 2:12f). Christ is the highway that Isaiah identified (Isa. 35:8). It is a way only available through Jesus, since it is only by his blood that he entered into the holy place for us (Heb. 9:12).

Is it not fitting, then, that we should not only believe in Jesus as our savior, but also confess him before others? The great commission to go to people of all nationalities and preach to them the gospel of Jesus is a command for us to confess our belief that Jesus is the son of God, and thereby the way, the truth and the life.

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## Plan of Salvation (5) - Baptism

Baptism is one of the most controversial steps in God's plan; and yet the bible is as definitive on it as on any other subject.

The Greek word for baptize is *baptizo*, which Strong defines: "to immerse, submerge; to make overwhelmed (i.e. fully wet). The word did not necessarily have religious significance, and if were translated (as it is in some versions), it would probably appear most often as *immerse*. However, the King James and many other translators chose to *transliterate* the word. That is, they imported the Greek word into the English language, probably because of the religious significance that was attached to the word at the time of the translation.

It is important to recognize this since it is often regarded as a ritual with strange and mystical powers. In reality, the only thing that makes it significant is that *it is commanded by God*. It is He who chose this simple act, involving one of the most common compounds on the face of the earth, to accomplish His will. And, it is the rendering of obedience to God's will that makes baptism an act of faith in the working of God (Col. 2:12) and *not a work of man*.

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## You Must Be Born Again

Countless scriptures either command baptism or indicate that it is an essential part of becoming a member of the body of Christ. Although first introduced by John the Baptist,

it is clear that John's is not the "one baptism" spoken of in Eph. 4:5. We know this because in Acts 19:3-5 Paul commanded those who had been baptized by John's baptism to be baptized *again* in the name of the Lord Jesus (i.e., by his authority). It is very possible for people to go through a ritual that is called baptism without it being the baptism commanded by Jesus.

So important was baptism that Jesus made it part of the great commission: <sup>19</sup>"**baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,...**" (Mt. 28:19). In obedience to this when the first gospel sermon was preached on the day of Pentecost, Peter answered the question: "What must we do" with the following: <sup>38</sup>"Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..." (Acts 2:38).

Baptism was practiced for remission (forgiveness) of sins in the first century. Hear what Ananias urged Paul to do: <sup>16</sup>"And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." (Acts 22:16) If Paul was saved before washing away his sins, then he was saved while still in his sins.

Jesus made being born again a condition of "entering into the kingdom of heaven" (Jn. 3:5). He described this as being born of water and the Spirit. Read Romans 6:3f: <sup>3</sup> Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

There are those who insist that the "water" in John 3 (<sup>5</sup> "**...unless one is born of water and the Spirit...**") is not referring to water baptism. There are at least three popular views held by those who believe that "out of water" in this verse does not refer to water baptism.

- 1) The passage should be translated, "born out of water, even Spirit. . ." This would make "water" symbolic of the Spirit. (The translators of the Amplified New Testament followed this interpretation.)
- 2) The word "water" should be understood as a reference to the Word of God. (This is probably the most widely held interpretation of the three, and verses such as {Eph. 5:26} and {Titus 3:5} are offered for support.)
- 3) The words "out of water" refer to the first birth of an individual, the natural birth. (An infant, surrounded by water in his mother's womb, is literally "born out of water.")

None of these views, however, can be considered tenable. The first two violate a basic rule of Greek grammar, and all three ignore the contextual interpretation of John 3:5.

The words translated "out of water and Spirit" in the Greek text of John 3:5 consist of two nouns governed by one preposition and connected by a copulative. There is a rule of Greek grammar which states that whenever such a construction occurs, both nouns must be understood either in a literal sense or in a figurative sense. One cannot be interpreted literally and the other figuratively. This is a common construction in the Greek text, and there are no exceptions to the rule. Thus, the first two views present a grammatical problem, for both interpret "Spirit" literally but interpret "water" figuratively.

When Nicodemus heard these words of Jesus for the first time, he had several good reasons to apply them to water baptism:

- (1) The fame of the ministry of John the Baptist, which centered around water baptism.
- (2) Jesus' own baptism by John (which he must have heard about)
- (3) John's teaching contained a strong emphasis on the distinction between water baptism and Spirit baptism (Matt 3:11; Lk 3:16; John 1:33; Mark 1:8). Therefore, when "water and Spirit" are mentioned together he would quite naturally think of water baptism.
- (4) Jesus (actually his disciples) were also water baptizing (vs. 22 & 23)

Since the context of this passage is water baptism, The 3<sup>rd</sup> view is also in error.

Water baptism alone is the only interpretation which is in keeping with the subject matter at hand, with the type, and which presents no problems in interpretation.

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## Have you ever heard it said?? . . .

*Baptism is a work and we cannot be saved by works ...* but Peter said (1 Peter 3:21):

"...baptism now saves you..."

Lest we be accused of taking this out of context, please read the context, in which a reference was being made to the days of Noah. The comparison is made as follows: <sup>20</sup>*who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.* <sup>21</sup>*And 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 Pet 3:20-21). Those who would discount the apparent meaning here must honestly give an interpretation for what they feel the words "*...baptism now saves you...*" means if it does not mean that baptism now saves you.

There is nothing magic in the water. It is just that God has chosen *this* way for you to become a member of His body, His church (Rom. 6:3). Men have invented all kinds of other ways (the "sinners prayer" being one, however nowhere is this found in the Bible), but they all fall short of God's way. Read all of the detailed cases of conversion, and see if they do not all end in the convert being baptized (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 8:38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15,33; 19:5).

Where is the magic in the water of the OT? On certain occasions, and for worship leaders especially, water purification was required before one could approach God, even when no specific offense was in view (see Exodus 19:10, 14; 29:4; Lev. 16:4). The bronze laver used for priestly washing was particularly significant. The ministering priests were required to wash in it before serving in the tabernacle; (<sup>20</sup>when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, that they may not die - Exodus 30:20).

In what sense did the water or the act itself have any effect or bring about purification? The fact is that neither the water nor the act of washing caused any change. It was a matter of divine decision and declaration. God simply declared that before the act of

washing, the person was unacceptable in His sight; afterwards the person was regarded as acceptable.

Consider the story of Naaman (a leper) in 2 Kings 5. He was instructed to <sup>10</sup>...“Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you and *you shall* be clean.” Now what magical properties did the Jordan river have? Naaman was not impressed either, <sup>12</sup> “Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?”. The answer to this is “no”. Why? Because God did not instruct him to wash in those rivers. The only thing that Gave the Jordan river the power to cleans him is God. <sup>11</sup> But Naaman was furious and went away and said, “Behold, I thought, ‘He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper.’ Like Naaman, we have a tendency to expect some great ceremony or supernatural occurrence (this is where “testimonies” spring from). The fact is, if we do not choose to do it God’s way then it will not be accepted (consider Nadab and Abihu and their strange fire Lev 10 and King Saul and his own way of doing things 1 Samuel 13 & 15).

Baptism is the *only* one of the steps that is obeyed at a single point of time. All of the others affect the rest of our lives, and they are summed up in the term "being faithful unto death."

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## Plan of Salvation (6) - Faithfulness

In Rev. 2:10 the Greek word for until is *achris*, which Strong defines: "(of time) until or (of place) up to." Thus, we find some versions (NAS, NKJ) translate it *until* and others (KJV) *unto*. The NIV yields "even to the point of death." It is reasonable to conclude, then, that God requires both that we be faithful *until we die* and that we be faithful *even if it costs us our lives*.

Many people think that taking the first five steps saves them, and yet it is clear from Rev. 2:10 that the "gift" of the "crown of life" is conditional on a walk of life that emulates out Lord Jesus Christ. Our attitude must be one of remaking our lives after our Lord. Philippians 2:5-8: <sup>5</sup> Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

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## Be Transformed

After expounding to the Christians at Rome both the goodness and the severity of God (Rom. 11:22), the apostle Paul begged them (Rom. 12:1-2): <sup>1</sup> I URGE you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

The vast majority of the New Testament is dedicated, not to telling people how to become Christians, but to telling them how they should behave themselves once they

are Christians (1 Tim. 3:15). These words fall on deaf ears as many Christians are mere hearers and not doers of them (James 1:22). Paul was speaking of action on the part of Christians as they make their lives over to be a "living sacrifice," totally dedicated to the service of God.

He goes on to state the way that this is achieved. If we are conformed to the world we cannot be faithful unto/until death. Instead, we are to fight against all that is evil in this world. Nothing short of an all-out declaration of war on our part will suffice. It would be hypocritical to bear allegiance to Jesus Christ, and then live a life disregarding what would please him. Even then we must recognize that it is God that is giving the increase through the power of the gospel (Rom. 1:16).

<sup>21</sup>"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." (Matthew 7:21) Here are people who suppose that creed will exempt them from deed, that obeisance will take the place of obedience, and that grace excludes works, including doing the will of God. These people imagine that piously addressing Jesus as Lord will suffice for making Him Lord. But Jesus' verdict is inescapable: no obedience, no kingdom.

<sup>9</sup>And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9). Jesus having qualified himself by his own obedience all the way, "<sup>9</sup>...became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation..." This is present tense, implying ongoing obedience as the rule of life. The notion that one initial act of obedience will cover a subsequent pattern of disobedience is foolishness. "<sup>18</sup>For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor." (Galatians 2:18). The verdict of this passage is clear: No continuing obedience, no continuing salvation. <sup>4</sup>The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; (1 John 2:4)

<sup>23</sup>And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. (Luke 9:23). He must renounce his self-sovereignty, accept whatever for him the cost may be to follow Jesus, and proceed to follow Jesus as a lifetime commitment. Jesus proceeds to pin onto this, eternal destiny. <sup>24</sup>"For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."<sup>25</sup>"For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? (Luke 9:24-25)

This is called a "transformation of the spirit" brought about by a renewing of the mind. *Renewal* implies that something was worn out, old, or in a state of decay. Such were our minds before they were renewed by the knowledge of God's righteousness.

It is essential that we reverse the natural process of spiritual decay by feeding on the word of God and allowing it to totally pervade our lives. That this is within our control is expressed in Rom 6:16: "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" We make this decision largely by whom we associate ourselves with socially and religiously.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul addressed the evils that could befall his fellow Christians should they allow themselves to be once again conformed to the present world.

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# Have you ever heard it said?? . . .

*Once saved, always saved ...* but Paul told some Christians (Galatians 5:4):

"You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

Lest some think that this has no relevance to us, since few Christians today attempt to impose circumcision, note that the sin under consideration is not the issue. If someone can fall from grace for committing *one* particular sin, why cannot one fall from grace for committing *any* sin that is not forgiven? Those who teach "once saved always saved" must answer this question in order to explain away Galatians 5:4. Some argue: "they were never saved;" but you cannot fall from something that you were never on; and you cannot be severed from something that you were never a part of.

Galatians 5:4 is just one of hundreds of scriptures that deal with this issue. I challenge you to prayerfully read any three pages in succession from the New Testament letters written to Christians (Romans through Jude). See for yourself the great concern that Paul, John, Peter and the other writers had for their fellow Christians falling from their saved state. The following are particularly convincing: 1 Cor. 9:23-10:21; Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 2 Peter 2:20-22.2

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## Work Out Your Salvation...

...with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). As we see in the context, Paul is urging members of the church that was at Philippi (Phil. 1:1) to be "...of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose ..." (2:2). Then he went on to command them to "<sup>5</sup>Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, " (2:5), and he described how Jesus left his heavenly home and emptied himself of his "equality with God" humbling himself in obedience to God to the extent that he died on the cross for our sins. He described how Jesus was exalted above every name, and the judgment (2:9-11).

With these facts presented as to the cause, Paul states (Phil. 2:12): "<sup>12</sup> 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; <sup>13</sup>for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

The command: "work out your salvation" is as clear as any other command given in the bible. It is a call for individual action; for each and every Christian to look deeply within ourselves and to be perfectly honest in recognizing what we discover. Do we find "both to will and to work" for God's good pleasure? Are we allowing the righteousness of God to work within us? Or, are we proud of our own works?

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## Faith or Works?

So often the question above is posed assuming that these two are mutually exclusive; that is, *if you are saved by faith you cannot be saved by works, or if you are saved by works you cannot be saved by faith*. This fallacy comes from the teaching of faith only. In fact, faith and works must coexist if either are to be acceptable to God.

This is made clear in James 2:14-26, where James states that faith *can* exist without works; however *that* faith is not acceptable to God because it is dead (26): "<sup>26</sup>For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

Similarly, works without faith cannot save us. This is what Paul was saying in Ephesians 2:8: "... <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, that no one should boast." These works are those that are apart from faith, i.e., works of our own creation, no matter how good they might be in and of themselves. It is clear that Paul is not speaking against all works, for in the *very next verse* he states: "<sup>10</sup>For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.." The whole purpose of our being faithful and partaking of God's grace is that we might glorify him through good works.

So, the command to "work out your salvation" should not seem strange. It is clear that it does not mean for us to invent our own system of salvation, for this would not demonstrate faith in God's way. What it does mean is for us to determine what God wants then, *because we trust Him to keep His promises*, do it to the best of our ability.

This is something that cannot be done by a "church." Our individual obligations to the church must be kept, and the *church is essential to God's plan for Christians*. However, your relationship to God does not depend on anyone but yourself. Paul did not say that the church should work out your salvation for you; he said for *you* to work out *your* salvation. Unless we recognize our individual responsibilities in this regard, we will never have the proper understanding of faith and works.

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## Have you ever heard it said ?? ...

"*We are not justified by works ...*". but James said (James 2:24):

*<sup>24</sup>You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.."*

Notice that James is not saying that we are justified by works *only*, or works apart from faith. However, the context of James 2:14f shows that faith and works are inseparable. If you have the type of faith that God requires it will result in good works. Thus, if you are not producing the works of God, you do not have saving faith.

Jesus emphasized this to his disciples in John 15:5-10: "<sup>5</sup> **"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. ... <sup>10</sup>"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."**" When we refuse to observe God's commandments, then we cease to be abide in him.

This is not salvation by perfect obedience, which is impossible since we have all sinned (Rom. 3:23). It is salvation by the grace of God that is conditional on our faith in Him. The bible teaches absolutely that there is nothing that we can do to earn/keep our salvation. There is a big difference between this and conditions. If your grandfather left you an inheritance with the condition that you be married before accepting it, and you married someone that you loved -- would you have earned the inheritance? This is an almost perfect analogy. God's conditions are for our own good, so keeping them is not

work or sacrifice. This requires us to learn his will for us and then to do it to the best of our abilities. Those who believe in God must also "seek after Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

<sup>6</sup>"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup>"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup>"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. <sup>9</sup>"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. <sup>10</sup>"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. (John 15:6-10)

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## The Kingdom of God

(Luke 17:20-21): Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; "nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

This certainly required a new mindset for the Pharisees, and other than some notable exceptions (e.g., Paul) they never were able to bring themselves to change their way of thinking about the kingdom. Among the things we hope to establish are:

- (1) the kingdom of God is synonymous with the church that Jesus promised to build in Matthew 16:18,
- (2) this has never been and will never be a political kingdom,
- (3) citizenship in this kingdom is attained by the prospect rendering obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and
- (4) the nature of this kingdom cannot be understood in terms of denominational practices.

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## When Did the Kingdom "Come?"

The word "come" is in quotes in the title for two reasons:

- (1) there is a sense in which there was a literal kingdom of God in Old Testament times, but clearly this is not the kingdom that both John the Baptist and Jesus stated was "at hand" -- Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7 – and
- (2) since "the kingdom of God is within you" and does not come by observation, it would not be expected to "come" in a literal sense.

Just what did John the Baptist and Jesus mean when they said that the kingdom was "at hand?" It is clear that they were trying to give the impression that it would not be far off, certainly not several thousand years off. Jesus confirmed this when he stated (Luke 9:27: **"But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."**) This infers that they were not then seeing the kingdom of God, and that some event would occur shortly in which they would "see" it.

It is clear that the "coming" of the kingdom did not precede Jesus' death. After his death his disciples asked him if he was going to restore it, seemingly still expecting a physical kingdom (Acts 1:4-8). Jesus responded by telling them exactly when the kingdom would come: on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

It was at this time that Peter was led by the Holy Spirit to proclaim that (Acts 2:30-31) <sup>30</sup>...GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT *one* OF HIS DESCENDANTS UPON HIS THRONE, <sup>31</sup> he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY." Thus, Jesus took the promised throne at the point of his resurrection. A throne implies a kingdom; if not it is a sham.

After Pentecost the kingdom is spoken of in the past tense as being in existence. Example (Col 1:13): "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son," and Christians are called "a holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9). This spiritual kingdom fits Jesus' teaching perfectly -- a kingdom that does not come by observation but is within. It also maps perfectly to the church as to its membership (citizenry), ruler (king), and time of establishment (coming).

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## Have you ever heard it said?? ...

"... all you have to do is to call Jesus Lord" but Jesus said (Matthew 7:21):

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

Citizenship in God's kingdom is for those who do the will of God; all of His will to the best of one's ability. This does not merit salvation, since we can never justify ourselves by works and earn it (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation is a gift of God. But God requires that we believe and seek after him (Heb. 11:6). It is God's will that this belief motivate us to turn from our sins in repentance (Luke 13:3). It is God's will that we continue to replace our sinful nature with a life of confession of Jesus as Lord of our lives (Mt. 10:32). It is the will of the Father that we be born again into his kingdom, as Jesus said <sup>5</sup>"**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.**" (John 3:5) We see that terms of entering the kingdom are identical to those of salvation -- identical to those for becoming part of the body of Christ (Rom. 6:3). Indeed, the word kingdom is used figuratively to demonstrate certain aspects of the church that can be described in no other way. Those who differentiate between the church and the kingdom do so with no biblical basis (Heb. 12:23,28).

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## The Church

The word "church" is from the Greek word ekklesia. According to Vine it is "from ek, out of, and klesis, a calling (kaleo, to call), [and] was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens 'gathered' to discuss the affairs of state, (Acts 19:39) ... It has two applications to companies of Christians:

- (a) to the whole company of the redeemed throughout the present era, the company of which Christ said, 'I will build My Church,' (Matt. 16:18), and which is further described as 'the Church which is His Body,' (Eph. 1:22; 5:23),
- (b) in the singular number (e.g., (Matt. 18:17) ... to a company consisting of professed believers, (e.g., Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:13; 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:5), and in the plural, with reference to churches in a district" (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words).

So, depending on the context, the word church can mean either a local group of Christians who bind themselves together, or the universal group of those saved throughout all ages (see Hebrews 12:23). Recognize, however, that in the first century the Greek word *ekklesia* did not have any religious connotation in and of itself. (In Acts 19:39 it refers to a political gathering, and in Acts 19:32 and 41 it refers to the mob that assembled to persecute Paul.) The fact that it is used exclusively in a religious sense today is indicative that we have radically changed the meaning of this word.

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## The Lord's Church

The most common usage of the word church in contemporary English is in reference to a religious meeting house. *Ekklesia* was never so used in the New Testament. It is difficult to communicate the meaning of "the body of Christ" when the word by which it is called has been generally relegated to provoking thoughts of bricks and mortar.

If we are to use this word as it was used in the New Testament we must realize that it applies to people who are called out. It never refers to some clergy organization or hierarchy. Further, it must be qualified. The Lord's church infers that there are other churches that are not the Lord's. This is totally consistent with New Testament usage. Christ's called out are separated from the world in order to serve God.

Like other words by which God's people are called (e.g., kingdom, body of Christ, bride of Christ, royal priesthood, elect race, etc.), *ekklesia* describes one aspect among many. No one term fully describes this group of people. All of them collectively define what it is intended to be.

The denominational concept of the church is that it is a mystical collection of all of the denominational churches. This is foreign to the New Testament, and the concept of divisions within the church is condemned in 1 Cor. 1:10f, as is the idea of denominating (giving names) to these variations.

Most people view the local church as pre-existing its membership. It is imagined that some mystical super organization sanctions a local congregation, much as a franchise is obtained from Macdonald's. This is not the pattern that we see in the first century. When the disciples were scattered after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1f), they went about teaching the truth that they had learned. This seed (Lk. 8:11) was sufficient to produce Christians, who heard, believed, repented, confessed their faith in Jesus as the son of God and were baptized into the body of Christ (Rom. 6:3).

Jesus said that where two or three are gathered in his name, he would be in their midst (Mt. 18:20). No authority other than Christ sanctions a local congregation. All that they need to be approved of the Lord is to practice the truth. The local church is a "bottom-up" organization in that it does not exist apart from faithful Christians (Heb. 8:11).

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## Have you ever heard it said??...

"... go to the church of your choice ..." but the apostle Paul said (Ephesians 4:4f):

<sup>4</sup> *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;* <sup>5</sup> *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* <sup>6</sup> *one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."*

The Lord's church is His body. This body is not divided and competing against itself. If we have the proper regard for God's word, we will be united in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10). No point of doctrine draws as much criticism as the firm biblical teaching stated above. Denominations can agree to disagree on practically everything, from the mode and purpose of baptism to the morality/immorality of homosexuality. However, the one single thing that they feel most threatened by is someone declaring that there is but one truth, one way.

Believers of Ephesians 4:4 should not conclude that all of their practices and beliefs are perfect and right, because this will never be the case with any group of people. However, if we do not accept the concept of a single spiritual reality, we will have no motivation to strive for it, and we are bound to miss the mark. That is why the devil gives such priority to "the church of your choice."

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