

5. What Shall We Do To Be Saved: Acts 2:37-41

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter ended his sermon in an effort to convict the people of their guilt—they had crucified the Lord and Christ. Peter said in Acts 2:36: “36 Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” What follows, is their response to Peter’s sermon and what he told them that they should do to overcome this guilt and be saved.

Brothers, What Shall We Do?

Acts 2:37

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

They Heard the Gospel

“What shall we do” rings out as a question for the ages, as we saw in the previous lesson. The listeners to Peter’s sermon asked the question here; and the Philippian jailor reiterated it in Acts 16:30; and Saul of Tarsus, in Acts 22:10. In Acts 16:29-30 the Philippian jailer asked the question after Paul and Silas miraculously escaped from their prison cells, “29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” To his question, Paul gave the jailer a specific answer in Acts 16:31-34:

31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family.

In Acts 22:6-10, Saul of Tarsus asked a similar question:

6 "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

8 "'Who are you, Lord?' I asked.

"'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 9 My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

10 "'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked.

A man named Ananius told Paul exactly what to do in Acts 22:14-16:

14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

A discussion of these conversions will follow in the appropriate chapters of Acts. For the purpose here, notice that they have a commonality in the questions asked—what must we do?—and the answers given—believe, repent, and be baptized. In each example of conversion, there is expressed urgency—“at that hour of the night,” in the instance of the jailer, and “What are you waiting for?” in the case of Saul. These same commonalities exist in the conversions of

these thousands on the Day of Pentecost. Indeed, every conversion recorded in the scriptures follows the commonalities in this divine pattern.

They Were Cut to the Heart

When they heard Peter's sermon, they were cut to the heart. The first step in obeying the gospel is hearing. Rom 10:14 makes clear that one must hear to believe, "And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?" It is from this hearing that faith comes according to Rom 10:17, "17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." The faith of Peter's audience was manifest in the response, "They were cut to the heart." The power of the gospel, told to honest hearts, delivers the power of God for salvation in Rom 1:16, "16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." The preaching, the hearing, and the believing always go together. This is the one and only plan that pleases God. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 1:21, "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."

Paul summarized these essential steps in obeying the gospel in 1 Cor 15:2, "2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain." As a result of hearing and believing, these on Pentecost cried out, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter Answers Their Question

Acts 2:38

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

All of Acts 2:38 is a direct reply to the question: "What shall we do? These notes consider each part, one by one; however, they should all be seen as the parts of a whole. The verse is perhaps the most succinct statement of the plan of salvation given us by the Holy Spirit. Belief is included here by direct inference in that they were cut to the heart and asked what to do, thus; they manifested belief by conviction and action.

Repent

Repentance, along with the forgiveness of sins, was an element of the great commission as recorded in Luke 24:47: "47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." According to Paul in 2 Cor 7:10, "10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." Godly sorrow is a prerequisite for repentance. There can be no faking it, as it were, it must be heartfelt.

Repentance is not an end in itself, but it leads to salvation and leaves no regret. In Acts 3:19, Peter gave the follow-up step to repentance—turning to God—when he said, "19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." Immediately upon obeying the gospel, one receives salvation, a heart without regret, the wiping out of ones sins, and times of refreshing. Separate from this repentance, there is no path that leads to these marvelous spiritual blessings. Paul warned in Acts 17:30, "30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent."

The same God, who gave his only begotten son (John 3:16), loves us and does not wish us to perish by failing to repent. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:9, "9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish,

but everyone to come to repentance." The scriptures are clear on the need for the sinner to repent in order to be saved.

Be Baptized

Just as the scriptures are clear on the need to repent, so they are clear on the need for the alien sinner to be baptized. *Repent* and *be baptized* are connected by *and*, which is a coordinate conjunction. Coordinate conjunctions link two parts of equal importance. In this case, one cannot say repentance is the only step in the conversion process; nor can one say baptism is the only step in the conversion process. They are both equally essential. The matter is the same with *belief* and *baptism*. The Lord said in Mark 16:16: "16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." *Belief* and *is baptized* are connected by a coordinate conjunction; therefore, they both are absolutely essential to salvation. Some false teachers hold that faith only saves, and others hold that baptism only saves (as in the case of infant baptism which requires neither faith nor repentance). Even though this command by Peter is eternally sufficient to require baptism of penitent believers for salvation, the scriptures offer overwhelming evidence that God demands baptism for salvation.

We have already seen that the Lord commanded, "16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." When Paul was told what to do it became imperative that he be baptized. Luke recorded the command given him in Acts 22:16, "16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." Thus far, the scriptures cited teach that baptism is essential for the forgiveness of sins, to be saved, and for washing away your sins. It is difficult, indeed, to imagine false teachers who blatantly ignore these scriptures and say that one does not have to be baptized.

Without baptism, there is no new birth. Jesus told Nicodemus of the new birth as being of water and the spirit in John 3:3-5

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

Paul explained how this new birth only takes place in Rom 6:3-4:

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may **live a new life**.

Peter wrote clearly that baptism saves in 1 Peter 3:21-22:

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . ."

The new birth creates a new creature—a creature born from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life with the pledge of a good conscience toward God. Paul stated the case in 2 Cor 5:17, "17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Every One of You

When Peter says, "Every one of you," he is speaking of the all-inclusive, universal nature of the gospel. The great commission of the Lord made clear that his gospel was for everyone, and that everyone, to be saved, had to obey the gospel. Matt 28:19 records that the gospel was to go to all nations: "19 Therefore go and make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In Mark 16:15-16, the Lord stated that it was to *all the world* and *to all creation*, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." God does not exclude a single person from obeying the gospel of Christ.

Paul spoke of this universal and all-inclusive nature of the gospel in Rom 1:16, "16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." There are no exceptions to who is included, and there are no exceptions to who must obey.

In the Name of Jesus Christ

"In the name of Jesus Christ," is the equivalent of *by the authority of Jesus Christ*. In Acts 4:12, Peter stated the absolute authority vested in Jesus and the name of Jesus, "12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Jesus asserted that God had given him all authority in Matt 28:18, "18 Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" This authority is all-inclusive and exerted in Christ by God when He raised him from the dead, according to Eph 1:20-21

20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Baptism—and every other scriptural act—are by the authority and in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul wrote in Col 3:17, "17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

In New Testament times, those, who were baptized into a name other than the name of Jesus, were quick to be told that they were in error. They were just as quick to be baptized properly in the name of Jesus. In Acts 19:1-6, Luke records an example of those inappropriately baptized in the name of John the Baptist:

19 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples 2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul also taught that baptism into names other than the Lord Jesus was error in 1 Cor 1:13-14: "13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? The answer to these rhetorical questions (questions to which the answer is self-evident) is, of

course, *no*. Today, as in the first century, one should not be baptized into the name of a man or into the name of a church or into any other name given by men.

Scriptural baptism is into (in) the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the Forgiveness of your Sins

In this command, Peter gave the central purpose of baptism: Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. Peter's command here is an exact fulfillment of the Lord's command when he gave the great commission to his apostles in Luke 24:47-48, "47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." False teachers, who claim baptism is because of the forgiveness of sins, do so because they believe that salvation comes by faith only. After salvation comes by faith only, in their view, one needs be baptized because of that salvation and into their denomination. It should be sufficient here to cite James 2:24: "24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."

However, the very nature of the Lord's promise and the language used force us to understand that in the phrase, *baptism for the forgiveness of sins*, forgiveness of sins results from baptism. The word used for *for* is the Greek word *eis*. Strong explains its meaning:

eis (ice); a primary preposition; to or into (indicating the point reached or entered), of place, time, or (figuratively) purpose (result, etc.); also in adverbial phrases:

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The phraseology of *forgiveness of sins* further confirms that forgiveness of sins is a result of baptism. In Matt 26:27-28, the Lord used the exact same phrase when talking of the power of his blood: "27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. No one would contend that the Lord poured out his blood because of the forgiveness of sins. No, it is certain that forgiveness of sins is a result of his shedding his blood. Heb 9:22 states clearly this use of *for* to indicate a *result in*, "22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

Apart from Christ shedding his blood, there is no forgiveness of sins; and apart from our being baptized, there is no forgiveness of sins.

You Will Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit

Peter promised those who repented and were baptized that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul defines the very nature of this promise in Eph 1:13-14:

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

The Holy Spirit guarantees our inheritance by assuring us that we were saved when we believed and obeyed the word of truth as in the Acts 2:38 text, "repent and be baptized." Paul makes it certain that we know this communication takes place in Rom 8:16-17:

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The scriptures are equally emphatic about how the Spirit testifies with our spirit in Eph 6:17: "17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The word of God—the sword of the Spirit—is perfect and complete in its communications. In 2 Tim 3:14-17, Paul details the all-sufficiency of scriptures to tell us all things, including how and when we know that we are saved:

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The Call of God Answered

Acts 2:39

39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Christ's promise is all-inclusive of the Jews and the Gentiles, conditioned by the statement, ". . . all whom the Lord our God will call." These notes have discussed how that those who are saved must call on the name of the Lord in Acts 2:21: "21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." The calling works two ways: Man calls on the name of the Lord, and the Lord calls man through the gospel.

Rom 8:28-30 teaches that those who are called are justified and glorified:

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; **those he called, he also justified**; those he justified, **he also glorified**.

2 Thess 2:13-15 teaches that the sanctifying work of the Spirit calls man through the gospel, which man must hear and believe:

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved **through the sanctifying work of the Spirit** and through belief in the truth. 14 He **called you to this through our gospel**, that you might share in the **glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:40-41

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Peter's concluding remarks show that the Lord called disciples through the word. Salvation was in their hands at this point. "Save yourselves!" He said. Those that accepted the word were added to their number. In verse 2:47, we shall learn that those added to their number were not only baptized, but also saved: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." The logic and conclusion are too clear to misunderstand:

All those baptized were added to their number.

All those added to their number were those being saved.

All those being saved were those who were baptized.