

BAPTISM'S UNIQUE ROLE IN GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

Presented by

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In Acts 16:30, we find what is probably the most important question that any human has ever asked. Paul and Silas had been thrown into jail for preaching the Gospel in the city of Philippi. During the night, however, an angel of the Lord miraculously opened the jailhouse doors to release them. When the jailer saw the doors open, he started to kill himself because he feared that all of his prisoners would escape. Paul told him, however, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” The jailer then fell down trembling before Paul and Silas and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

That question—“What must I do to be saved?”—is a question that every accountable person on Earth should ask at some point in his or her life. Unfortunately, when people today do ask it, they frequently do not receive a correct, biblical answer. For example, there are many people in the religious world who teach that in order to be saved a person must “call on the name of the Lord” and then “pray the sinner’s prayer.” Let’s examine each of those items in light of what the Bible has to say.

First, does the Bible teach that a person must “call on the name of the Lord” in order to be saved? It certainly does. When Peter presented the first Gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, he said, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). But what did Peter **mean** by his statement? As we search for the answer to that question, we need to remember that until we know **everything** that God has said on a specific subject, we cannot know the **whole truth** about that subject. The psalmist said in Psalm 119:160, “The **entirety** of Your word is truth.” Partial truth is no good. We need the “entire truth.”

So, what does the Bible teach about how a person “calls on the name of the Lord”? We find the answer to that question in Acts 22. Saul (who later would become the apostle Paul) was traveling on a road toward Damascus when Jesus blinded him with a bright light. Saul fearfully asked, “Who are You, Lord?” The word “lord” means “master” or “savior.” It is obvious that, at this point, Saul believed in Jesus and was ready to acknowledge Him as his Master or Savior. In response to Saul’s question, Christ said, “I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting.” Saul then asked, “Lord, what would You have me to do?” Jesus answered, “Go into the city and you will be told there what to do” (Acts 22:10). God then instructed a prophet by the name of Ananias to go teach Saul.

When Ananias found Saul, he said to him, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, **calling on the name of the Lord.**” How did Saul “call on the name of the Lord” according the Scriptures? He was baptized for the forgiveness of his sins. **That** is what it means to “call on the name of the Lord.” Today, when we finally realize that we are, like Saul was, living in sin, then we must be willing to do what-

ever God tells us to do in order to get ourselves out of that horrible predicament. We, like Saul, must “call on the name of the Lord” by being baptized in order to wash away **our** sins. The Bible is crystal clear on this point.

Second, does the Bible teach that we are to “pray the sinner’s prayer” in order to be saved? According to many within the religious world, people who want to be saved must pray a prayer that goes something like this.

“Dear Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I acknowledge You as my Lord and Savior. I now ask You to come into my heart, forgive my sins, and save me. Take control of my life, and make me the kind of person You want me to be. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

This, however, is **not** what the Bible teaches. You will never find such a prayer in the New Testament. How can the sinner’s prayer be a proper method of salvation if it is not even found within the Scriptures? If we could find just one example of someone who was praying to God, but who still had to do something else to be saved, then we could prove conclusively that the sinner’s prayer is not a scriptural way by which to be saved. Saul, whom I have just discussed, was a person who was praying to God for salvation, yet he still was not saved—which is why Ananias commanded him to be baptized and wash away his sins.

God is the only One Who can save us. And He is the One Who has the right to set forth the requirements of what we must do to be saved. Unfortunately, there are some people today who teach that all a person has to do to be saved is “have faith.” This is known in the religious world as “faith-only” salvation. But the Bible does not teach faith-only salvation. In fact, it teaches the exact opposite. In James 2:24 we are told, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and **not by faith only.**” This is the only time in the New Testament where the phrase “faith only” is used, and here it is stoutly condemned!

Some people teach that if we have to **do** anything to be saved (like be baptized), then we will have **earned** our salvation. They suggest that since salvation is the free gift of God (Romans 6:23), we obviously do not have to “do” anything to obtain it. All that is required of us is to simply “have faith.”

But let me repeat: **God** is the only One Who can save us. And he is the One Who has the right to set forth the requirements of what we must do in order to be saved. The fact is, God **has** told us what we must do to be forgiven of our sins. If we do what He has commanded us to do, that does not mean that we have somehow “earned” our salvation. Let me give you an example of how this works.

Suppose I take a dollar bill out of my wallet and I say, “I am going to give you this dollar bill. It is a free gift, and I want you to have it.” If you “just believe” my statement (that is, if you just have “faith only”), but you never **do** anything to actually obtain the dollar bill, will you have the dollar bill to spend? Absolutely not! You not only have to “believe,” but you also have to physically **do** something. You have to reach out and take the dollar bill from my hand in order to receive the benefit of the free gift that I am offering you.

Ask yourself: Have you done anything to “earn” the dollar bill? No, you have not. But did you have to meet certain requirements in order to receive the free gift of the dollar bill? Yes, you did. The same principle applies to salvation. When God tells us to do something, and we do what God has commanded, that does not mean that we somehow have “earned” our salvation. All it means is that we have faithfully met the requirements that God set forth for us.

There are a number of passages in the New Testament that stress the importance of baptism in salvation. In Mark 16:16, Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Does baptism **alone** save us? No, it does not. In 1 Peter 3:21, Peter wrote that “baptism does **also** now save us.” The key word here is “also,” because the Bible teaches that we **also** must believe that Jesus is God’s Son (John 3:16), repent of our past sins (Luke 13:3), and confess that Jesus is our Savior (Romans 10:10). Baptism is **essential**, however, because it is where we “call on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16), come into contact with the blood of Christ (Romans 6:3-4), receive forgiveness of our past sins (Acts 2:38), get “into Christ” (Galatians 3:27), and are made “a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Only baptism can accomplish those things. And we cannot go to heaven without them.

So, in spite of what people in the religious world might say, we cannot be saved by simply “having faith,” calling on the name of the Lord, and praying the sinner’s prayer. Instead, we must do **everything** that the Bible commands—including being baptized for the remission of our sins. If we leave out something that God has commanded us to do, then He will leave our names out of the Book of Life (Revelation 22:18-19). And we will end up missing heaven. What a horrible thought **that** is!