

January 23, 2014

Question: What exactly must a person do to be "saved" and into heaven? Also, is a "death bed" confession enough to get you into heaven?

Answer: It is probably the most important question of life. "What must I do to be saved?" The question has eternal significance, therefore an incorrect answer is unacceptable. We must seek the truth.

The Universalist responds that we need do nothing. God's love is so all-encompassing that no one will be lost. If we cannot be lost there is no need to concern ourselves with salvation.

The Faith Only Advocates argue that we need only believe to be saved. It is true, we can never do enough to merit our salvation, but it is not true that faith alone (only) will save. James wrote: "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). Faith, by itself, places one in the company the demons who "believe and tremble," but it will not save apart from our obedience to Jesus Christ (James 2:19; Hebrews 5:9).

The Pentecostal demands an experience. We must have a special call of God and be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to be saved. The Spirit, they argue, will empower us to perform miracles like the early disciples. We should speak in tongues, heal the sick, and raise the dead. If we are lost, it won't be our fault. We can blame the Spirit for not calling us.

The Bible offers the only acceptable answer to our question. Jesus said: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). The devil says, "He that believeth and is not baptized shall be saved." That's the same devil who told Adam and Eve, "Ye shall not surely die." They shouldn't have listened to him then, and we can't afford to listen to him now. Salvation is provided by the blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18, 19). It is provided to those who believe and obey Him. It will be realized by those who are faithful to Him (Matthew 10:22).

On our own we would be powerless to doing anything about our plight, but we are not left to our own devices. Though undeserving, God loved us and sent his Son into the world to redeem us. It was an act of grace on the part of our Creator. Without His grace through Jesus (Titus 2:11, 12; Ephesians 2:4-10), salvation would not be possible. But God loved us in spite of our sinful ways, and Jesus came to redeem us from our sins. God's part in our salvation is love and grace, and our part is faith and obedience.

Are you saved? Should death strike or Christ return, would you be ready? If not, here's what you need to do: 1) read and study the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15); 2) believe what the Scriptures tell you (Romans 10:17); 3) repent (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38, 3:19); 4) confess the blessed name of Jesus (Matthew 10:32, 33; Romans 10:9, 10); 5) be baptized for the remission of your sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38); and 6) live your faith daily (Philippians 1:27; Romans 12:1, 2).

Some will respond that they cannot see how baptism plays a part in our salvation, but the reality is that God's demands are just that, His demands. Genuine faith does not question what God commands. Genuine faith simply obeys (Hebrews 11).

Jesus came into this world to save us (John 3:16, 17). But Jesus can save only those who want to be saved. We can throw a drowning man a life preserver, but if he refuses to take hold of it, it will not save him. So it is with Christ. God sent Him, but we must accept Him! Just as rescue for a drowning man demands that he both take hold of the life preserver and continue to hold on, so it is with us and Christ. We must accept Him as our Savior on His terms, and then remain with Him faithful to the end (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Our obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ provides initial cleansing of our sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). By remaining faithful to Christ and our commitment to Him, what John called "walking in the light," His blood continues to cleanse us of sin (1 John 1:7). Christians are not sinless, but we are continually being cleansed by the blood of Jesus so that we can live in the real hope of heaven some day. Our salvation is therefore not earned or deserved, but is made possible by the blood of Jesus, the bearer of God's grace. That salvation is available to all men, but will only be realized by those who trust and obey Him.

Concerning the second question regarding "death bed" confessions, it is important to note that the longer one delays his response to Jesus the less likely he is of obeying. Thus, Solomon wrote: Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). The Bible warns of the urgency of obedience, and the danger of delay (2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 2:1-3).

The devil's most effective lie is that there is time enough, yet. In a modern parable, the devil summons three apprentice demons to his side. Each is asked what he would say to lead a soul astray. The first said, "I will tell them there is no God!" The second said, "I will tell them there is no hell!" But, the third said, "I will tell them there is no hurry!" To the third Satan said, "Go, for you will lead many to their doom!"

It should be obvious that the longer one delays obedience to Jesus, the less likely it is that such obedience will ever take place. Still, in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), Jesus did teach that His invitation is open to men even at the eleventh hour. One can obey Him near the close of life and enjoy the rewards of heaven for eternity. But, that does not mean that the demands of our Lord in response to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" can be set aside. The terms of pardon remain the same - faith, repentance, confession, baptism, faithfulness.

Remember, our responsibility is to teach the truth regarding these matters. Our focus is not on who is right, but what is right. We can be confident in judgment that Jesus will render the correct verdict for each soul.

It's been said that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." It's true! I don't deny that many have the best of intentions when it comes to following Jesus, but intending to follow Him will not compensate for our failure to do so. The call of Christ is for real action, not good intentions. It is possible to wait until it is too late. There may come a time when we are physically unable to comply with Christ's demands. We will have no one to blame but ourselves. He says, Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30). Do it now, before it is too late!