

Greatest Questions



Ever Asked

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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

The most important question that I know is the one recorded in Acts 16:30. It came from the lips of a Philippian jailer who was contemplating suicide. But within a matter of moments he was wanting a life, not just a life, he wanted eternal life. He asked, "What must I do to be saved?"

The answer to that most critical of all human questions is the focus of this lesson. Obviously, I want to address this question and its answer to those who aren't Christians. There are many who honestly don't know the answer to the jailer's question: What must I do to be saved? More than anything else in the world, you need not only to know the answer, but to respond to it. Secondly, I want to address this question and answer to Christians who do understand the reasoning and the ramifications of your commitment. I hope this lesson will better equip you to share the answer to the question with those who desperately need it. I'm very concerned about how we effectively communicate. I'm concerned that we often don't do a very good job of expressing just how good the Good News of Jesus is and the beauty associated with the way that God wants us to accept it.

Often, we assume what we think people know. We assume what we think they understand. Many have a pat answer, but it doesn't answer the question. We just don't communicate. I love the story of the couple who had been married for 70 years and he was pretty hard of hearing. On their 70th anniversary the little old lady leaned over to him and said, "I'm so proud of you!" He looked around at her and said, "I'm tired of you, too!"

I don't know about you, but I think at times I've been guilty of spiritually speaking while being hard of hearing—not hearing what was being asked or sensing where they were. So helping those of us who are Christians to communicate the answer to that question may be the most important use of this lesson. Because folks, there is no question about the power of the gospel. It is the power of God to convict and to convert in any culture in any generation. If it's not doing that in abundance, it's not because of a lack of clarity of the signal; it would more be the way it's being transmitted.

What must I do to be saved? The entire New Testament, in one way or another, is focused on the answer to that question. Ephesians 2, the first ten verses give us a concise and powerful description about what one must do to be saved. Ephesians 2:1-10

1. *Recognize the need.*

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." Folks, if anyone is going to come to Christ, they must first see a need for that conversion. This is where, as ambassadors of Christ, Christians often fail. We leapfrog to an answer when we don't have a question.

There are two broad categories of people who don't come to Christ. The first category is those who think they are so bad that there is no chance in the world that God could ever reach them or save them. "You mean God could save me?" In my experience as a preacher and as an ambassador for Christ, I find that those people are usually easier to reach. Because once you break through their guilt and shame and pour the love and mercy of Christ in that opening, they begin to loosen up.

But there's a second group that seldom comes to Christ and this is the vast majority. Those who think I'm a good person and I don't really need to be saved. I'm always intrigued by the Gallup Polls that indicate 90% of Americans say, "I'm a Christian." Yet, that percentage is nowhere close to the percentage of our population who assemble together, have their name on any church roll, who read the Bible at all, who pray or who give money to any congregation.

As you look closely at the questions they answer, you begin to understand why they think as they do. Most of America defines being a Christian as basically being a good person. They've made the two things synonymous. Believe it or not, there are tons of folks out there who think they are already Christians just because they perceive themselves as good.

I've learned one of the most insightful questions you can ask a person and obviously you do this tactfully as conversation goes along. Ask them if they're going to heaven. Usually that will startle them and they'll say, "Well, I guess I am." Then I like to ponder, "Well tell me, why do you think you will?" Over 90 percent of the time, the answer is "I do a pretty good job at work, I love my kids, I'm basically honest, I give to the United Way and I don't break any laws." In other words, what they're saying is: The good in my life outweighs the bad. I deserve to be saved." They don't understand the need. They don't understand the scope of sin. They're like Simon, the Pharisee who answered Jesus by saying "The one who has forgiven much, is the one who's going to love much." (Luke 7)

If I'm going to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ or if I am going to effectively communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ, the first thing I've got to do is see the need. I've got to discover the reality of lostness. I've got to understand that life is not some great humanity test that's going to be graded on the curve about how good I am in relation to everybody else. If I'm going to respond to who Jesus is and what he has done, it will be because I've first realized the truth, that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23), and that the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)

Paul says, "you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1) and "All of us also lived among them at one time." (Ephesians 2:1) Until someone sees and feels the need, he or she won't become a Christian. So step one is to recognize the need.

2. *Realize the solution.*

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions—It is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:4) There's the solution. Once the need is communicated, then and only then, can we talk about a solution.

The modern American mind is: "I can pull myself up by my bootstraps. I'm a self-made man. I don't need anybody else and I can take care of this problem. I'm independent." But the gospel message says. No, you can't take care of this problem. It's bigger than you. You don't have what it takes to solve it. The great news is God, who is rich in love and mercy, has already solved the problem. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions."

The non-Christian who really has a curious mind will ask, "Now, I've heard about Jesus around Christmas and Easter but just how does Christ save me? How does Jesus Christ make me alive? Paul answered that question: "For God made him who had no sin (that's Jesus) to be sin for our sakes, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Do you know what that's called?

Theologians and scholars call it "Substitutionary Atonement." That sounds awfully scholarly but it's not hard to understand. Break it down. What does substitute mean? It means, "One who takes the place of another." Atonement means "One who pays a debt for another." Jesus took your place, he was the substitute and he atoned; he paid your sin debt to God that you could not pay. Therefore, you share in his righteousness. That is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of Christianity.

But often we discuss how without first discussing why and who made the how possible. The why and the who need to be understood first. People need to know the Christ. They need to fall in awe before the one who came from heaven's throne room, God come in the flesh, the one who never sinned, who hung on a dirty cross

and who was treated like he was the world's only sinner. We need to fall on our knees when we understand who Jesus is. We don't need to walk away smugly with some formula for salvation. Our message, our hope and our ticket is the person of Jesus Christ.

Peter did this the first time the Gospel was preached. He talked about the need. He helped them realize there was a need. He showed them their sin. He told them "This Jesus, whom you crucified," now that's showing them their sin, isn't it? I mean he could have shown them a million more, but he said, let's just take the most dominate one, "You crucified the son of God." The second thing he did was to show them the solution "God has made Him both Lord and Christ." Then in the next verse, Peter's listeners asked in essence the same as that all important question asked by the Philippian jailer. "Brothers, what shall we do? We recognize our sin. We realize the solution is in Jesus, now. What do we do?" That leads to step three.

3. Respond in faith.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) Folks, there it is. Scripture makes it clear that there has to be a response to this grace. Grace just means the gift offered by Jesus and in a word that response is a thing called "faith."

Again, there is a communication problem. Much of the world has defined the word "faith," in their own terms, "just believe." Just believe that Jesus is the Son of God with all your heart, that's faith. The Bible says faith is being sure of what you cannot see and what you may not understand. (Hebrews 11:1) The Bible says that faith is going where God says. (2 Corinthians 4:5)

Folks, just to ask Jesus to come into your heart as a personal Savior is not what Ephesians 2:8-9 is saying. Read it again. The passage says we are saved by grace through faith; not our works and not our own merits. The Ephesians statement is confirmed throughout the Bible, particularly the New Testament.

To properly understand Ephesians 2:8-9, let's allow God to define his desired faith response. There is no question that belief is at the core of faith. He has always dictated the faith response that he wanted. For example, when the Israelites were being bitten by poisonous snakes, what did God want as a faith response? Do you remember? He had Moses fashion a bronze serpent on top of a pole and he lifted that up. God said, "If you want to be healed from that, here's what you do. You look at that serpent. You'll be healed." (Numbers 21) That was the faith response. Who decided what that faith response would be? The people? No, God did.

Consider when the children of Israel were coming into the Promised Land and they were about to take on Jericho, that great walled and most fortified city. God wanted belief in his power but he also wanted a faith response. I want you to march around that city once a day for six days and on the seventh day I want you to march around it seven times, and then I want you to call out in a great shout.

What faith response did God ask of Naaman, the Syrian leper, in 2 Kings 5 when he came down to see the prophet Elisha? Elisha didn't even go down to see him. He just sent word down through a messenger. He said, you tell him to go dip seven times in the Jordan River. It was God's idea.

What faith response did God ask of Peter after he had fished all night and he came to the shore? Jesus said, Peter, I want you to go launch out into the deep one more time and let down your nets.

There are countless other examples. But the question is: Did any of those responses merit or supply the power for the miraculous event that followed? No. No. No. Do you understand that? The faith response didn't supply the power. The children of Israel could have marched around the wall of Jericho a thousand times and that wall wouldn't have budged an inch if it weren't for the power of God. Naaman could have dipped in the Jordan River from sun up to sun down and he would have still left there a leper, except for the power of God. But when they responded in faith as God had prescribed then His power was channeled to them. God always

determines the faith response. He always has. So, what faith response does God demand for accepting Christ? Let's allow the Bible answer rather than someone's opinion. The Book of Acts is the only inspired book of the Bible that gives us the pure history of the birth and the growth of the early church. In it and it alone are the only specific details of individual conversions of those first Christians. It's where to go to learn how they became a Christian. We should do no more or no less.

I want to show you concisely all of the accounts of conversions to Christianity found in the book of Acts. Now, we're not going to be able to take them in their entirety so I would encourage you in your private study to go back and look at them in their entire and the whole context. Look at the moments how they came to Christ and assimilate all that data we find.

1. The day the church began when those first 3,000 asked the question to Peter and the apostles. "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' 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.'" (Acts 2:37-38), "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." (Acts 2:41)
2. "But many who heard the message believed and the number of men grew to about five thousand." (Acts 4:4)
3. The next reference is in the conversion of Simon, the Sorcerer. "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized ... And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw." (Acts 8:12-13)
4. The Ethiopian eunuch. "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?' And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing." (Acts 8:35-39)
5. Saul, who would become the great apostle Paul, gives his own testimony of what happened as he was on his way to Damascus. "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied." (Acts 9:3-5) After Saul gets to Damascus and talks with Ananias, "Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized." (Acts 9:18)
6. The conversion of the first Gentile, Cornelius. "Then Peter said, 'Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." (Acts 10:46)
7. "Some of the men from Cypress and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news of Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:20-21)
8. "There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed." (Acts 14:1)
9. Lydia came to Christ through the preaching and teaching of Paul, "One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members other household were baptized, she invited us to her home." (Acts 16:14)

10. The Philippian jailer said, "He (the jailer) then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized." (Acts 16:30)
11. "Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men." (Acts 17:12)
12. "A few men became followers of Paul and believed." (Acts 17:34)
13. "Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized." (Acts 18:8)
14. Paul comes to Ephesus and stays there for two-and-a-half years. "And he 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.' So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?' 'John's baptism,' they replied. 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.' On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 19:2-5)
15. "'I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.'" (Acts 20:21)
16. And then finally the last one. Paul once again recounts his conversion experience and said, "I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' I asked. 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. 'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. 'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.'" Ananias asked Saul, "'And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'" (Acts 22:16)

That may have been a little lengthy, but I wanted you to see it for yourself. Nine different times in those conversion accounts, all that we find in the book of Acts, we're told that the people believed and obviously they did. Three different times we're told that they repented and the word, "repent," means "to turn," to turn away from the world and turn toward Jesus Christ. Ten different times, we're told they were baptized. The word, "baptized," means to be immersed, to be dunked or dipped, meaning the total body going beneath the water. When one is raised from the water, and resurrected, he came out walking into a newness of life. By the way, each time they were baptized, it wasn't a week later and it wasn't a month later, it was immediately. Now, what faith response does God set forth for coming to Christ?

I realize that much of the world asked "Do you really believe God requires baptism as a part of faith response for accepting Christ?" They could also ask "Do you really believe that Moses and the Israelites were required a look at the bronze snake as their faith response?" "Do you really believe that God required the Israelites to march around that city like idiots once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day?" "Do you really believe God expected Naaman to dip seven times in the Jordan?" "Do you really believe he wanted Peter to go out after fishing all night and cast those nets one more time?" Do you really believe God wants the response He requested from all those people for their physical healing or the response He demands of us for our spiritual healing, the forgiveness of our sins. Of course, the answer is God expects man to obey Him based upon knowledgeable faith.

A few other verses should put everything in perspective about the way God desires us to respond to Him in faith. "'Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'" (Mark 16:16) But, what is the purpose of baptism? "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into

Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection." (Romans 6:3-5:1)

Paul says, the reason God chose to incorporate it as part of the faith response, contingent upon belief, contingent upon repentance, and a turning to God, is to re-enact the very death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter gave the same reason when he was talking about Noah and how he was saved because of his faith response when God sent that great flood upon the earth. "And that 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." (1 Peter 3:21) There's nothing magical about the water. It's not holy. It's not what it does physically by taking away anything dirty or unclean. Its whole purpose is "The pledge of a good conscience toward God" Why? Because it's fulfilling, the faith response that God has asked for.

There are a lot of friends who very respectfully and honestly disagree with what I've shared with you, despite all that I've shared and the reasoning behind it. Going back to our passage in Ephesians 2:8-9, where it says, "For by grace are you saved through faith—and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of works, lest anyone should boast." They say, "But baptism is a work, it's a work."

Let me show you one last verse as we summarize everything up "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." (Titus 3:5) See it's not by what we do. It's not our power. It's his mercy. He is the power. "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:6) Baptism has nothing to do with working; it has everything to do with submission. It has everything to do with faith. It means nothing apart from belief. It means nothing apart from Jesus Christ. Baptism is simply the faith response connecting us to the great power that saves us from our sins. Amazing Grace #1273, Steve Flatt July 21, 1996