



Salvation

By

Faith only?



Is it True?

Salvation by Faith Only!

Is it True?

History rewrites scriptural salvation.

After the turn of the 4th century AD, Christian churches began to multiply throughout Italy, Spain, and Britain. Local customs and traditions became interlaced with scriptural doctrine. Without the written word in the hands of the people, unscrupulous interpreters corrupted the plan of salvation. Instead of a simple theme of hearing the Word of Christ and obeying it through faith, repentance, confession and baptism, harsh penance and sacrifices began to make religious life intolerable.

Some men attempted reform programs. Many were exiled or executed for their efforts. No significant changes took place until the second millennium AD when one or two Protestant groups introduced "salvation by faith alone" to counteract Roman Catholic "works". In the 18th and 19th centuries, restoration movements tried to move salvation back to first century "faith and works".

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, all of these teachings lived side by side. In the last 50 years as Catholic influence has declined, TV charismatics have promoted "a belief only" salvation with a fury. It is not uncommon to hear impressive promises like "if we simply ask Jesus to come into our hearts, we will be saved". The 3rd millennium AD introduced us to the worldwide Internet where Bible enthusiasts can surf between religious messages and demonic games.

What does the New Testament say about "belief only" salvation?

To examine "belief only" salvation, it is best to compare it with the scriptures. Are there biblical instructions which come with these religious kits or are they like so many modern gadgets, a part or two is missing? For instance, Acts 2: 38, Romans 6, 1 Peter 3:21, and Acts 22:16 are rarely read in the same context with descriptions of salvation by faith. - Check it out!

Other essential features like: "Apostles" 1 Corinthians 9:22; "Baptism" Romans 6, Acts 22:16, 1 Pet 3:21; "Confession" Romans 10:10; "Gospel" Romans 1:16; "Holy Spirit" 1 Corinthians 6:11; "Preaching" 1 Corinthians 1:21; "Repentance" 2 Corinthians 7:10; "Words" Acts 11:14; and "Hope" Romans 8:24, are also noticeably omitted from salvation requirements.

God has not left us to wonder whether salvation is a hodgepodge --- to pick and choose the easiest method on our time-table. David said "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path." Psalm 119:105

Some eliminate awkward Scriptures.

A few years ago while studying with a lady in Tobago, she wanted to know "why do some meet for church on Saturday and some on Sunday?" When we asked her to turn to chapters 8 and 9 of Hebrews to show how the covenants changed when Christ came, she said she did not have such a book in her Bible. Sure enough the Bible her church gave her had removed the entire book.

Some teachers argue that salvation by "faith only" does not rely on "water salvation" (baptism). To re-enforce this, they remove certain Bible texts which clearly shed light on all of the plan of salvation. Others advance the doctrine of salvation by "faith only" by simply eliminating a few vital scriptures dealing with baptism in context with forgiveness of sins.

For example, Mark's description of the Great Commission of Christ in Chapter 16:9-20 is abandoned as "an error of later copyists". It is alleged that "in all likelihood these verses are not genuine". Mark's account reads: *"And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." vss15-16.* This compromise, in effect, challenges God's omnipotent ability to maintain the purity of His own scriptures. But the bible is self-teaching. David declared in Psalm 12:6-7 *"The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times. You, O LORD, will keep them; You will preserve him from this generation forever."*

Sceptics reason that since the phrase "is baptized" is absent from the last part of verse 16, "baptism itself must not be essential for salvation --- only "belief". Anyone vaguely familiar with English construction' will easily understand that when "belief and baptism" are mentioned they are both prerequisites for being saved by Jesus. It isn't necessary to repeat both for those being condemned. For what unbeliever would readily submit to baptism?

Did Christians in the first century understand the Plan of Salvation?

At least 3000 clearly understood the meaning on the "Day of Pentecost". In Acts Chapter 2, Peter gave a scathing sermon indicting the entire Jewish nation for killing the Son of God. Moved by their consciences, this audience pleaded for some relief of this great sin, fearing the wrath of God. "*What shall we do*" they cried, "*to rectify this evil thing we have done?*" Peter told them precisely what Jesus had instructed him ("*...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you ...*") - i.e. "*Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" in verse 38.

Some contend "it makes good sense to read 'Repent and be baptized' as the result of, or on the basis of, already having one's sins forgiven". If that was true, why didn't Peter tell the multitude in Acts 2:38 to "pray for Jesus to come into their hearts and give themselves to Him"? Or "just have faith"? Or "believe that Jesus is the Christ and you will be saved?"

No, instead they were told to "*repent and be baptized and wash away your sins*". Why? Because they already believed, otherwise they would not have asked what they should do! And if they believed and were thereby saved having their sins forgiven, why were they so terrified to ask what they should do?

Being in a saved condition is always subsequent to baptism and rooted in instant action. Whether it was the 3000 who were baptized on Pentecost, or the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert "who came to some water", or the Philippian jailer "who washed their wounds, and was immediately baptized, he and his household, or Lydia's household whose hearts were opened and responded to Paul's preaching and were baptized, -- New Testament converts were baptized at the point of conversion, or as soon as possible afterward - many after only one sermon.

Repentance, Faith and Grace, but no Baptism.

Those who advocate, "faith only" salvation maintain that "repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace". Since we are also "saved by grace" (Ephesians 2:8), are we to conclude we are "saved only" by grace, repentance and faith at the same time? If so, Peter's instructions to 3000 people must have

been flawed, because he included baptism as part of the formula.

Some reject baptism as part of salvation by saying it is a "perversion of the New Testament meaning". They allege that baptism is not necessary for being in the Kingdom of God or the church in general. But, they say, it is necessary for "fellowship in the local church" as a prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and access to the Lord's Supper. There are no scriptures offered to substantiate this belief. But it is interesting that those who reduce baptism to such a minor formality insist that it be administered only by their clergy!?

The Apostle Paul does not leave us uninformed as to the "meaning of baptism" in Romans 6:3ff. *"We are baptized into Christ and His death "... "we are raised to walk in a newness of life"... "our old self is crucified with Jesus, so that our body of sin might be done away with"... "for he who has died is freed from sin "..., "so that we should consider ourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus".*

Was Paul saved on the road to Damascus?

Some point to the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus as proof of being saved before baptism. But when Paul fell to the ground on the road to Damascus, he asked *"who are you Lord?"*. (Acts 9:4-5) *"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting"* was the answer. Did Paul ask how to be saved? Or did Jesus say he was saved? Was Paul saved at that moment?

The answer is "no" to all of these questions! Instead, Jesus told him *"to enter the city and it shall be told to you what YOU must do to be saved".* (vs6) It was not until later when Paul recounted the same story in Acts 22, while in Judas's house, that he was told by Ananias what he must do: *"For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name."* (vss 15-16)

Can there be the slightest doubt that the Apostle Paul's sins were washed away and he was saved in Acts 22: 16? Without baptism, we are not only left in our sins and without the Holy Spirit to help us with our struggles, but we are unsaved.

The promise of the Holy Spirit in connection with baptism and salvation.

There is yet another critical issue in understanding the entire sequence of events

in the making of a Christian. Jesus promised "...and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Matt 28:19-20.

Somehow in the "belief only" system, the Holy Spirit becomes a part of the new Christian when he or she believes. We are never told how this happens but no verse is provided to substantiate His appearance??

If we receive Him immediately after baptism as Matthew contends, one wonders why there is the slightest delay in being baptized? And if the Holy Spirit **IS** received after baptism in Matthew's account, why are we not saved after baptism in Mark's account of this same "great commission"?

Is the Holy Spirit's residence in our lives that important?

Apparently Jesus thought it was important when He said "*I will send the Holy Spirit and He will convict men of sin*", "*convince them of righteousness*", and "*teach them about the judgment*" (John 16:8). Also most important, He said, the Holy Spirit will "*guide you into all the truth*" (verse 13). Paul later wrote that the Holy Spirit's role is our "pledge or seal" that we are God's children (2 Corinthians 5:5).

Therefore, the Holy Spirit is indispensable to help us understand all of the truth of God's word. Without the Holy Spirit, we can never understand the plan of salvation with its related parts. Someone must teach us the word. We must believe that word. We must resolve to repent of our past sins. We must confess Jesus before men. We must be baptized to have our sins washed away. Then we must grow and teach others what we have learned.

Conversely, we can never obtain eternal life without the help of the Holy Spirit. We cannot have the Holy Spirit in our lives unless we are baptized. We cannot be baptized without confessing Jesus as the Christ before men, repenting of our sins, and believing His unerring Word. And we cannot believe that unerring Word without first understanding and trusting in it.

If we are lead to doubt it's veracity in the beginning, as some teach, how can we learn to trust "*everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them we may become partakers of the divine nature ...*" I Peter 1:3-4

But what about the thief on the cross?

For some unexplained reason, "faith only" enthusiasts seem thrilled that the thief on the cross was saved without baptism. They feel "since it could happen to him, it might happen to us".

The obvious answer why the thief wasn't baptized is because the man was crucified to a cross which made his baptism humanly impossible.

But the primary reason is that this man lived under the Mosaic covenant. Baptism for the forgiveness of sins did not become a command until after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as Paul explained in Romans 6.

And finally, any individual act of clemency does not negate a legal demand for the penalty of crimes committed by others. Why would anyone today rest his eternal security on such a loophole?

There is a terrible irony that the thief may wind up robbing many people of their salvation.

A man on his way to be baptized is killed.

This last ditch explanation is one of a number of straw men constructed to cloud the Truth. Only God knows a man's heart. Men, who we might determine to be exceptional saints, may be demons in the eyes of God. If God chooses to grant clemency based on the intentions of a man to be baptized who is providentially hindered, that is God's prerogative.

To purposely delay baptism until the last moment makes no sense. It implies we can try to deceive God and do as we please on this side of eternity and then hope to slide into home plate at the last moment on the other side of eternity. Anyone who pictures God as being that naive obviously has no concept of the nature and power of God.

Again, why would anyone risk eternal damnation on such a flimsy hypothesis to put off baptism?

Rewriting the commands of Jesus.

Changing the sequence of any of these features of the plan of salvation destroys their spiritual and biblical relationship to each other. It is not a choice we dare be flippant or casual about. "If it does not make any difference **what** we believe, it probably does not make any difference **whether** we believe".

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