



# "WHAT MUST I DO?"

When the apostle Peter preached about Jesus, his listeners cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). When Christ appeared to Saul, Saul asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). After the Philippian jailer narrowly escaped death, he said to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). You can ask no more important question than this: "What must I do?"

## SOMETHING TO DO

Perhaps we should first establish that there *is* something for you to do if you desire salvation. Christ died for all mankind (Titus 2:11), but this does not mean that all will be saved. Jesus spoke of two ways which men travel: a narrow way "that leads to life" and a broad way "that leads to destruction." He emphasized that "many" are on the broad way and "few" are on the narrow way (Matthew 7:13, 14). In other words, many will be lost, while relatively few will be saved.

Salvation is a gift, but a gift can be accepted or rejected. Each individual decides whether to accept God's gift of grace or to reject it. Jesus' statement in Matthew 7 declares that more reject God's gift than accept it.

How can we accept the gift of salvation? God tells us in His Word that we are to accept it through *obedient faith*. Christ said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does the will* of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21).<sup>1</sup> The author of the Book of Hebrews wrote, concerning Jesus, that "He became to all those who *obey* Him the source of eternal salvation" (Hebrews 5:9).<sup>2</sup>

Some object to this. They say that if men have to *do* anything to be saved, salvation is no longer by grace. Let it be clearly understood that our obedience does not *earn* our salvation. Rather, through obedience, we may *appropriate* the salvation provided by the Lord.

What is the difference between *earning* and *appropriating*? The following illustration may help you understand the difference:

A man knocks at the door of a house. When a woman comes to the door, he says, "I am very hungry. Do you have any work I can do to earn a meal?" The woman replies, "There are logs in the back yard that need chopping. If you cut the wood, you may have a meal." The man chops the logs and finally sits down to the meal. Let me ask you: As the man eats the food, will he feel that he has earned the meal? Certainly, he will.

Let me change the story: A man knocks at the door of a house. When a woman comes to the door, he says, "I am very hungry. Do you have any work I can do to earn a meal?" The woman replies, "I've just put a big meal on the table, much more than I can eat. Come in, sit down, and eat all you want." The man happily accepts her invitation and is soon enjoying the food she has prepared. Now, I ask again: Did this man earn the meal? Not at all. It was a gift, "by grace." What he did was *appropriate* it.

How did he appropriate it? By accepting the woman's invitation, by coming into her house and sitting at her table and eating the food. What if he had *not* appropriated it? What if he had said, "No, thank you" and had gone on his way? What if he had gone into the house but had refused to eat? Obviously, he would not have benefited from her generous offer. (Yes, I know that these

responses sound foolish, but people reject the Lord's invitation [Revelation 3:20] all the time, and that is much more foolish.)

We cannot earn our salvation, but we can and must *appropriate* God's gift—by faith and obedience. What is involved in our response of faith and obedience will be made clear as our study continues.

## WHAT WE MUST DO

When Jesus gave the Great Commission to His disciples (or followers), He said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; . . ." (Mark 16:15, 16). Paul said that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). He also said that the gospel (the good news about Jesus<sup>3</sup>) is "the power of God to salvation" (Romans 1:16). Salvation begins with learning about Jesus and His way. One must be an attentive hearer or reader, a responsible and responsive student. In the remainder of this lesson, we will discuss three necessary responses to the gospel.

### Believe in Jesus

The first response is faith, or belief: "Faith comes from hearing." The importance of faith was stressed in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Acts 16:31, Romans 5:1, and Ephesians 2:8, 9 are among the many passages which teach that Christians are saved by faith. Jesus said that "unless you believe that I am He [that is, the Messiah<sup>4</sup>], you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

"Belief" and "faith" mean the same thing. Sometimes people try to make "belief" mean one thing and "faith" something else, but both are translations of the same Greek word. What is the faith (or belief) that saves us? Saving faith can be expressed by the word "*trust*": To be saved, we must stop trusting in our own goodness and start trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

We cannot overemphasize the importance of faith. Faith is the foundation of every other positive response to the Lord. In John 1:11, 12, we read that Jesus "came to His own [people, the Jews], and those who were His own did not receive Him.<sup>6</sup> But as many as received Him, to

them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." Notice that the terms "receive" and "believe" are used interchangeably. We cannot *receive* Jesus into our lives without first *believing* in Him.

Unfortunately, some isolate faith and teach that we are saved "by faith only." Faith is the beginning, not the end, of our response. Reread John 1:11, 12. Receivers/believers were given "*the right to become children of God.*" Before my wife Jo and I married, we secured a marriage license. That license gave us the right to get married; it did not mean that we were already married. Likewise, faith sets us on the road to salvation; it is not the end of the journey. We are saved by faith, but not by faith *only*.

Saving faith cannot be separated from the expression of that faith. This can be illustrated by John 3. As we have already seen, verse 16 stresses the necessity of faith. Now, read the last verse of that chapter: "He who *believes* in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not *obey* the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (v. 36).<sup>7</sup> This is one of the places in the New Testament where the ideas of "belief" and "obedience" are interchangeable.<sup>8</sup> (See also Romans 10:16.) Saving faith is obedient faith.

The only place in the Bible where the phrase "faith only" (or "faith alone") is found is in James 2:24, which says that we are *not* saved by "faith alone." In the KJV this verse reads, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified,<sup>9</sup> and not by faith only." The New American Standard Bible has "Ye see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone."

Take a minute or two to read James 2:14–26 so you can see James' line of reasoning. Focus especially on verses 14, 17, 20, and 26:

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? . . . Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

. . . But are you willing to recognize . . . that faith without works is useless? . . . For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

The faith that saves is not a dead, sterile, useless faith. It is alive and active.

### Repent of Sins

One of the ways that true faith expresses

itself is in repentance. Jesus said, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Peter told his listeners, “Repent, and each of you be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Paul said, “God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30).

As our faith in Jesus grows, we should come to see ourselves as what we are: sinners in need of salvation.<sup>10</sup> This should produce repentance.

What exactly is repentance? Some think of repentance as sorrow for sin. Others think of it as a change of life. When a man truly repents, he *will* be sorry that he has sinned, and his life *will* be changed, but repentance itself stands between these two responses.



In the diagram above, note that godly sorrow produces repentance. Second Corinthians 7:10 tells us that “the sorrow that is according to the will of God<sup>11</sup> produces a repentance . . . leading to salvation, . . .”<sup>12</sup> Then notice that a change of life is the result of repentance. Everywhere Paul traveled, he told people “that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance” (Acts 26:20). Repentance comes *after* godly sorrow and *before* a change of life.

What, then, is repentance? The Greek word translated “repent” literally means “to have a new mind.” It refers to a *change of mind*.

When applied to people, repentance is a change of mind concerning *sin*. When a person realizes that sin breaks God’s heart, he sees how terrible sin is. When someone learns that sin caused Jesus to die on the cross, he is repulsed by sin. Sorrowing over his sinfulness, he determines that, with God’s help, he will live a better life. This decision is what the Bible calls “repentance.”

True repentance will always have an effect on a person’s life. It will not produce a perfect life, because no one is perfect; but it will change the life for the better. If there is no change of life, there probably was no repentance.

Repentance has been called “the hardest part of conversion.” It is the hardest part because it

calls for a change in lifestyle. Change is difficult. Change is painful. However, if we are to be saved, we must strive to change—with the help of the Lord.

### Confess Christ

Another way that faith in Jesus expresses itself is by the confession of that faith. The close relationship between faith and confession is seen in Romans 10:9, 10:

. . . if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.<sup>13</sup>

If we want to be saved, we must “confess . . . Jesus as Lord.” Christ Himself stressed the necessity of confession:

Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 10:32, 33).

What does it mean to “confess Jesus”? Look again at Romans 10 and Matthew 10:

- It is a confession of faith in Jesus (so it is not a confession of sins<sup>14</sup>).
- It is a confession with the mouth (so it is not just a confession with the life<sup>15</sup>).
- It is a confession before others (so it is not a secret confession).

One confession of faith is found in Matthew 16: Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was. Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). “Christ” is the Greek form of the Hebrew word “Messiah,” which means “the anointed one.” The Jews had been looking for the Messiah for centuries. Peter expressed belief in Jesus as the Messiah sent from God. The phrase “Son of the living God” indicates that Peter realized that Jesus was divine.

Another confession of faith is found in Acts 8. This second example is of confession before baptism. Philip had been teaching an Ethiopian official about Jesus.

As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch<sup>16</sup> said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]<sup>17</sup> And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him (Acts 8:36–38).

Observe that the official's confession of faith was almost the same as the one made by Peter in Matthew 16. Observe also that it was "with the mouth" and "before men" (actually one man, Philip).

Before you are baptized, you need to confess your faith in Jesus. Christ said that faith is to precede baptism (Mark 16:16). Thus I cannot scripturally baptize a man before I am sure he believes. How can I know that he believes? He has to tell me.

Before people are baptized, they are usually asked if they believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Some simply answer, "Yes." Others make a simple statement of their faith. Both are valid ways of making "the good confession" (1 Timothy 6:12, 13).<sup>18</sup>

Of course, your confession of Jesus ought to continue after you are baptized. Early Christians sometimes used the symbol of the fish to affirm their faith in Jesus:<sup>19</sup>



The Greek word for "fish" is *ichthus*. Written in capital Greek letters, it looks like this:

**ΙΧΘΥΣ**

The Greek letters in the word were used to represent names and titles of Jesus:

- I (iota) is the first letter in *Iesous*,<sup>20</sup> the Greek word for "Jesus."
- X (chi) is the first letter in *Christos*, the Greek word for "Christ."
- Θ (theta) is the first letter in *Theou*, the Greek word meaning "of God."
- Y (upsilon) is the first letter in *Uios*, the Greek word for "Son."
- Σ (sigma) is the first letter in *Soter*, the Greek word for "Savior."

By the use of this simple acrostic, early Christians affirmed their belief that Jesus was the Christ, that He was the Son of God, and that He was their Savior.

## CONCLUSION

This lesson has centered on the response of faith—a faith that leads to repentance, a faith that will cause us to confess Jesus Christ. In the next lesson, we will discuss the response of baptism.

The question I want to ask now is "Do you believe in Jesus?" Ask yourself that question. Do you really believe that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God? Is this faith on your lips? Is this faith having an impact on your life? Jesus said, "Unless you believe that I am He [the Messiah sent from God], you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). ❖

<sup>1</sup>Emphasis mine.

<sup>2</sup>Emphasis mine.

<sup>3</sup>Both the English word "gospel" and the Greek word from which it is translated literally mean "the good news." In 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, Paul said that the heart of this good news is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

<sup>4</sup>The word "Messiah" is a Hebrew word that means "anointed." When Jewish kings were crowned, they were anointed with oil and were called "God's anointed." The Jews looked forward to the coming of the great King, the ultimate anointed One, the Messiah. Jesus was that Messiah, but many Jews did not realize it.

<sup>5</sup>Faith in Jesus presupposes faith in God (Hebrews 11:6) and faith in the Bible. See the lesson on "Authority."

<sup>6</sup>As a nation, the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

<sup>7</sup>Emphasis mine.

<sup>8</sup>The KJV has "believeth" in both places, but two different Greek words are used, as is indicated in the NASB.

<sup>9</sup>This almost sounds as if it contradicts what Paul said in Ephesians 2:9. Understand, however, that Paul was speaking of works of *merit*, while James referred to works as an expression of *faith*.

<sup>10</sup>See the previous lesson.

<sup>11</sup>The KJV has "godly sorrow." "Sorrow . . . according to the will of God" explains what "godly sorrow" is.

<sup>12</sup>The "sorrow of the world" mentioned in 2 Corinthians 7:10 is the sorrow expressed by the individual who is sorry that he got caught doing wrong, or sorry that he has to suffer the consequences of his actions. He does not have the kind of sorrow that will make him *quit* his sinning.

<sup>13</sup>Some suggest that this passage teaches salvation "by faith only." Notice, however, that in this passage, it is not *faith-only* that saves, but *faith-plus*. In this passage, it is faith-plus-confession. In other passages it is faith-plus-repentance, faith-plus-baptism, or some other combination. Faith-plus is not faith-only. We must consider *all* that the Bible says about salvation.

<sup>14</sup>We will discuss the confession of sins later, when we talk about how a Christian gets forgiveness of his sins, but a confession of sins is not required before one becomes a

Christian. By the very act of requesting baptism, he says, "I am a sinner in need of salvation."

<sup>15</sup>It is important to confess Jesus by our *lives*, but this is not what is meant in Romans 10 and Matthew 10.

<sup>16</sup>The usual meaning of the word "eunuch" is "castrated male." The heathen often made eunuchs of high officials in an effort to remove temptation.

<sup>17</sup>This verse is in brackets because some translations have the verse in a footnote instead of including it in the text itself. In any case, most scholars agree that this verse represents the practice of the early church in requiring a

confession of faith before baptism.

<sup>18</sup>When Jesus made "the good confession" (1 Timothy 6:13), He simply affirmed what Pilate said (Matthew 27:11).

<sup>19</sup>We know about this symbol from secular history, not from the Bible. The symbol of the fish is found often on the tombs of early Christians.

<sup>20</sup>The pronunciations of several Greek words in this list are affected by special markings, which I have not attempted to reproduce in my transliteration. Also, the Greek has two different kinds of "e"s and "o"s, but I have made no distinction between them.

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