

## Chapter 18

### ***The "Salvation Prayer"***

"If you accept God's message of salvation, his Holy Spirit will come in unto you and make you spiritually born anew ... You can become a child of God by praying to him right now as I lead you."<sup>1</sup> This concept, frequently repeated by LaHaye and Jenkins, is an expression of a widely-proclaimed, popular road to salvation. The invitation is often similar to the following advertisement entitled "The Pathway to Heaven":

Follow these Steps:

1. You need to be saved.
2. You cannot save yourself. [Eph. 2:8-9 quoted]
3. God loves us enough to provide salvation. [John 3:16 quoted]
4. By faith believe Jesus and accept Him. [Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9 quoted]

If you would like to invite Jesus into your life, repeat this prayer... [prayer given]

If you said this prayer, we would like to know. Please contact our office at...<sup>2</sup>

Here is an example of such a prayer written at the end of a tract by the American Tract Society:

Dear God, I know I am a sinner and unable to save myself. But I do believe You love me, and that You sent Your Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for my sins. Right here and now, I ask You to forgive me every sin and give me the gift of eternal life. Thank You, dear God, for hearing and answering my prayer, and for giving me eternal life as You promised You would. Amen.<sup>3</sup>

The authors of the "Left Behind" series believe that salvation is obtained by making a decision to "receive Christ" in prayer. As LaHaye expresses it elsewhere: "If there is any question in your mind as to whether you have ever invited Jesus Christ into your life, may I urge you to get down on your knees right now and ask Him to save you."<sup>4</sup> The variations are many, but the essence is the same: "Accept Christ ... Believe and pray this prayer."

### The Issue is Not...

Before examining the "salvation prayer" and considering the alternative for that prayer, we must clearly understand what is *not* at issue here—as far as Bible believers are concerned.

**Jesus' blood** is not the issue here. There are religions and even churches that teach a bloodless salvation, that is, if they teach any personal salvation at all. However, virtually all of us who accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God are in full agreement that "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). This is not the issue in this chapter. We all agree "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). We agree Jesus is the only Savior.

**Grace** is not the issue here. Those who accept tradition on a par with the Bible might not think much about grace. However, the majority of us who accept the Bible as the only authoritative source of divine doctrine agree that apart from the grace of God there is no salvation. Man cannot save himself: "There is none righteous, no, not one' ... for all have sinned ... being justified freely by His grace" (Rom.

3:10, 23-24). We agree "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). In other words, the second death—the lake of eternal fire—is what we all deserve; it is what we all earn. Salvation, on the other hand, cannot be earned by anyone; no one deserves it; it is a gift of God. Grace is not an issue in this chapter. To express these first two items another way: God's part in man's salvation is not the issue here.

**Faith** is not the issue here. Who would argue with one of the best-known verses in the Bible? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Heb. 11:6 tells us "without faith it is impossible to please Him [God]." The gospel of Jesus Christ is "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Paul, by the Spirit, wrote to the brothers and sisters in Ephesus about Christ, grace, and faith:

That in the age to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph. 2:7-9).

We are saved "by grace . . . through faith" because of what Jesus has done for us. Aside from Jesus, His blood, grace, and faith there is no salvation. None of these is an issue in this chapter.

### **What is the issue?**

The issue in this chapter is not about Jesus' part in our salvation; the issue is about our part. What is required of us in order that God's grace and Jesus' blood may be applied to our lives? We all agree that sinners must believe—they must have faith. However, is faith by itself sufficient? Does simply believing that Jesus is my Savior thereby make Him my Savior? Is salvation based solely on what the mind

accepts as truth? Can I obtain salvation by simply inviting Jesus into my heart? There is really no issue in the "Left Behind" series that is more important than this one.

The issue in this chapter is whether faith *alone* is a sufficient response on the part of the sinner to obtain salvation. Does salvation come the moment one believes? Does all faith save? If not, what kind or degree of faith saves? Have we heard everything that is essential to salvation when we read, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31)?

The issue in this chapter is identifying the moment a person is changed from being unsaved to being saved. Exactly when and how is a person born again? At what point in a person's life can he or she say, "Now I am a Christian"? What is the precise moment a person's past sins are forgiven, giving that person a clean slate upon which to begin a new life in Christ? At what point in a person's life does God declare that person to be justified, redeemed, and forgiven? This is the issue.

### **The "Faith Only" Doctrine**

The most popular teaching on salvation among Bible believers today is that we are saved by faith alone. It is common to read a tract or view a preacher on TV stating that a person cannot be saved by religion, church membership, a good life, baptism, the Ten Commandments, or love for one's neighbor. Rather, we are told it is simply a matter of believing, accepting Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, and inviting Jesus into our hearts. In his Revelation commentary, Tim LaHaye says: "The steps of salvation here are clear: (1) 'whoever hears my word' and (2) 'believes him who sent me.' That means trusting in Jesus . . . The one who trusts has everlasting life."<sup>5</sup> LaHaye continues to explain that believing and trusting have to do with receiving everlasting life and accepting Jesus. All this follows his item (2). He offers no item (3). Thus, LaHaye teaches there are only two steps to salvation: hear and believe.

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Today's faith-only concept owes much of its impetus to Martin Luther. As Luther studied the Bible, especially the book of Romans, he became increasingly aware of the false doctrines and practices by which Roman Catholics attempted to earn their salvation by works. These works included such doctrines and practices as indulgences, veneration of relics, the sacraments, masses for the dead, pilgrimages, purgatory, penance, and intercessions by "saints," especially "the virgin." Luther clearly saw in the Word of God, which had been virtually closed for centuries, that we cannot save ourselves. He saw that salvation is by grace and can be obtained through faith in the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross.

However, Luther took this new found truth to the opposite extreme. As is often the case in such circumstances, the pendulum swung from one extreme to the other. Luther concluded that we are saved not only by faith but by faith alone. So convinced was he of this new idea that he dared to add the word "alone" to the text of the Bible. With no evidence whatsoever from Greek manuscripts, he dared to alter the Word of God. Rom. 3:28 reads: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." Luther changed it to read, "justified by faith alone." Some modern versions, such as *The Bible in Today's English Version*, have followed Luther's example. Furthermore, Luther belittled the book of James as an "epistle of straw" because it declares: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and *not* by faith only" (James 2:24, italics mine). He could not agree with the only text in the entire Bible that uses the phrase "faith only"!

It is true that Luther saw more to faith than a persuasion of the existence of God, more than mental agreement with the teaching of Scripture. For Luther faith was something more than a simplistic faith that involved the mind without translating into a changed life. For him, faith included more than the intellectual element. Today's popular religion so often waters down Luther's concept until what is taught and

practiced is not what he had in mind at all. The sad reality is that many believers have latched onto Luther's "only" while lacking the depth of Luther's faith. Luther did mankind a great disservice by *adding* "only" to Romans and *subtracting* the epistle of James from authoritative Scripture. The fact that he found it necessary to openly revise the Bible is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that something was lacking in Luther's understanding.

Even if James is an "epistle of straw" and is removed from the Bible, the Bible still teaches that we must *do* something to be saved. In fact, the Master declared faith itself to be a work. When the people asked, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus replied, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:28-29). Furthermore, Jesus declared: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Calling on Jesus is not enough for salvation. Jesus says we must also do God's will. Are Jesus' words also straw? God forbid! Did Jesus teach faith? Absolutely! Did he teach faith only? Absolutely not! Did Paul teach faith? Absolutely! Did he teach faith only? Absolutely not! Paul's epistle to the Romans begins and ends with a reference to "obedience to the faith" (1:5; 16:26).

### **"Only" Perverts Divine Truth**

**Grace:** Our need of the grace of God as well as our need of faith were discussed earlier. Both truths are abundantly clear in Scripture. Without grace there is no salvation; without faith there is no salvation. However, when "only" is added to these statements, confusion results. Often the dual statement is made that we are saved by grace alone and by faith alone. This is a self-contradiction. If we are saved by grace alone, faith is not required. If we are saved by faith alone, grace is not needed. It is an abuse of language to say we are saved by both and then add "alone" to each one.

**Jesus' death:** It is one thing to say that we are saved by

Jesus' death. It is a very different thing to say that we are saved only by Jesus' death. In 1 Cor. 15:3 Paul affirms, "Christ died for our sins." However, verse 17 shows we cannot add "only" to verse 3. Verse 17, written by inspiration, says: "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" Yes, Jesus died for our sins. However, His death saves no one without His resurrection. A dead savior is no savior at all. We dare not add "only" to God's holy Word.

**Qualifications of a bishop:** It is one thing to say that a bishop in the Lord's church must be "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2). It is a very different thing to say that this is the only requirement. This Timothy text gives eighteen requirements for a man to become a bishop. To say that any of these requirements is the only requirement is to deny the other seventeen. To agree with even 15 of the 18 is still a denial of the remaining three. We dare not treat the Word of God this way. The Bible is not a cafeteria from which to pick and choose. We must take the full menu.

**Faith:** It is one thing to say we are saved by faith. It is a very different thing to say we are saved only by faith. Paul by the Spirit informs us: "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). Faith minus love equals nothing. A few verses later Paul concludes: "Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (13:13). Love is greater than faith. The apostle John wrote: "Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:7-8). Faith without love is empty; it will save no one.

What does the Word mean when it says we are not saved by works? Romans 4 can help us understand: "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God . . . Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt" (4:2, 4). In these verses, Paul is talking about earning salvation. He speaks of works as deserving wages. The message of the

early chapters of Romans is that we are all sinners, that no one deserves salvation, that salvation is a gift of God, that we cannot earn salvation, and that salvation comes through faith in the work of Christ on the cross. Yet even our faith does not *merit* salvation, otherwise there would be no need for God's grace. Faith saves simply because God has so decreed, not because by having faith we *deserve* to enter heaven. Neither does our obedience help us to *earn* salvation. We are saved by grace. Nothing we believe or do can merit, deserve, or earn eternal life.

When Paul spoke of faith in the epistle to the Romans, did he mean faith alone? Did he mean we could disobey God as long as we believe in His Son? Did he mean that mental assent is all God cares about? Did he mean that nothing matters except what we believe in our heart? In Rom. 6:17, Paul speaks of the transformation that had taken place in the lives of the brethren in Rome: "God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you *obeyed* from the heart that form of *doctrine* to which you were delivered" (italics mine). Then in 10:9-10 he asserts: "If you *confess with your mouth* the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and *with the mouth* confession is made *unto salvation*" (italics mine). The faith that saves is not limited to the mind. One text refers to obeying doctrine, the other to expressing faith "with the mouth ... unto salvation." Romans is a great book about salvation by faith; it never was a book about salvation by faith alone. "Only" and "alone" pervert God's Word by exalting selected truths while minimizing others.

### **Nobody Accepts "Faith Only"**

The above discussion, by itself, misses the real issue. The reality is that nobody believes that salvation is by faith alone. The idea may be mouthed, defended, and preached. The idea may be sincerely believed. Yet, the faith-only doctrine and practice demonstrate that the term "faith only" is

a misnomer. Even those who teach the doctrine will make such confusing statements as: "Salvation is received by faith alone, but saving faith does not remain alone."

Those who teach salvation by faith alone readily agree that not all faith saves. That is why they often speak of "saving faith." A case of faulty faith is seen in certain influential persons referred to by John: "even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (John 12:42). They "believed in Him, but..." To describe this deficient faith, one might suggest that their faith was not strong enough. Another might explain that they did not mix their faith with action. Yet another might express the view that they had mental faith but lacked trust. Some would clarify that there are different *kinds* of faith, others that there are different *degrees* of faith, others that we must consider what must be *added* to faith, others that we must take into account what is *included* in saving faith.

Whichever way a person desires to express it, there is general agreement among all Bible believers that we need more than simplistic faith, more than intellectual acceptance of the truth of the Bible, and more than acknowledgement that Jesus died for our sins. Faith that produces no change of life is insufficient; faith that is never expressed is lacking something; faith that does not motivate to action does not meet God's requirements. The following specifics may help to clarify these concepts.

**Repentance:** Even though it is often not expressed, many of those who hold the faith-only doctrine agree that there can be no salvation without repentance. They agree with this even though repentance is not mentioned in most of the Scriptures that teach salvation by faith. The explanation is made that repentance is a part of saving faith or that faith and repentance are opposite sides of the same coin. It is assumed that we must repent because Jesus commands it in Scripture such as Luke 13:3: "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish." This assumption is quite right. We

absolutely must look at other verses besides the ones that speak of faith.

However, once other verses are included and repentance is accepted as a requirement for forgiveness of sins, salvation is no longer by faith only—mentally believing is insufficient. A person's faith must be real enough and strong enough to produce a change in behavior. Anything less raises questions about what the person actually believes. Of course, repentance must be based in and motivated by faith; it must be an expression of faith. In whatever way a person wants to explain the relationship between faith and repentance, one without the other is unacceptable to God. Even if a person wants to explain that saving faith includes repentance, he has made "saving faith" more than faith alone.

**Calling on the Lord:** The faith-only view is frequently upheld by quoting Rom. 10:13: "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." Amen. We must recognize that Jesus is Lord. We must look to Him for salvation. Calling upon the Lord is putting our faith into action. Paul followed that statement with a series of rhetorical questions on this very issue:

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? (Rom. 10:14-15).

Five steps are involved here to produce salvation: sending, preaching, hearing, believing, and calling. When a person hears, he can believe or disbelieve. When a person believes, he can call or not call. This is not faith only. Even Tim LaHaye confirms this point when he writes: "These are the individuals who demonstrated their sincere faith by calling on the name of the Lord for salvation. . . . only those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved."<sup>6</sup> He says calling is a demonstration of faith. Amen. Only those who demonstrate their faith will be saved. Amen. Faith alone does not save. No one really believes it does.

**The Salvation Prayer:** Why do sermons end with an invitation to "pray this prayer with me"? Why do so many tracts end with the sinner's prayer? In the first book of the "Left Behind" series, the authors do not wait until the final chapter as is often done in books. Throughout the book, they make it clear that the way to "receive Christ" is through prayer. However, if salvation is by faith only, why the prayer? Could it be that even though preachers mouth the faith-only words, yet in their innermost being they realize that we all need to act on our faith? Could it be that deep inside, their common sense, or even "Scriptural sense," tells them that there must be some kind of visible response, that salvation cannot be a totally private affair, and that people must *do something*? An unexpressed faith is insufficient faith.

Jesus agrees that sinners need to do something. However, Jesus did *not* say, "He who believes and says the sinner's prayer will be saved." Never! Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Men have substituted the sinner's prayer for sinner's baptism! In Acts 2, read the account of the first time after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension that the gospel in its fullness was preached. Peter did not invite the people to come forward to pray with him. Not at all! Nevertheless, Peter, like present-day preachers, did expect a visible response from his hearers. There is nothing wrong with that. However, the visible response the inspired apostle called for was this: "Let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (2:41).

### **Why Baptism?**

Baptism is not arbitrary. God did not pick just anything. The symbolism in baptism is most impressive. The physical act of immersion in water portrays a death, burial, and

resurrection. The significance is twofold. Baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ Jesus who is the only one who can forgive our sins. Baptism also pictures what is happening spiritually to the person at the moment of baptism. A person who has died to sin buries the "old man" of sin in the watery grave, then rises from the water to walk in a new life.

Just as Jesus taught that "he who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16), so He likewise taught that one must be "born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). It does not take much thought to realize that being born again on the one hand, and going from death to life on the other hand, are two similar figures that vividly refer to the same process. In the one case, conversion is pictured as a new birth. In the other case, conversion is pictured as a death, burial, and resurrection. In both cases, conversion is declared to be the start of a new life.

This spiritual reality, of course, is invisible. It is a matter of faith in God's Word. The same is true of Jesus' death for our sins. His death was visible to those present; however, the purpose of Jesus' death could not be seen with the physical eye. It is a matter of faith that He died for our sins. Likewise, baptism in water can be seen by those present, but it is a matter of faith that immersion in water is the moment sins are forgiven and new life begins.

The apostle Paul saw no contradiction between 1) faith being the basis of salvation and 2) baptism being the moment salvation arrives with a new life. In the same Roman epistle that teaches salvation by faith, Paul wrote:

How shall we who *died* to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His *death*? Therefore we were *buried with Him* through baptism into *death*, that just as Christ was *raised from the dead* by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in *newness of life*... knowing this, that our old man was *crucified with Him* (Rom. 6:2-4, 6, italics mine).

Baptized into His death. Jesus died for our sins. He shed His blood on the cross for our sins. How do we contact His blood and death? Paul says we are "baptized into His death." We contact His death in the water. Keep in mind that Jesus was buried when He was dead. As obvious and simplistic as that might sound, the same must be true with us. We must die to sin—the old man must be crucified—before we are buried. The faith-only doctrine teaches that baptism is one of the first acts of obedience *after* a person has been born again. However, burial is not for those who are alive; burial is for those who are dead.

Paul described the relationship between faith and baptism in Col. 2:12-13: "*Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God . . . having forgiven you all trespasses*" (italics mine). A sinner is dead in sin (Eph. 2:1). The dead person must be buried. Once buried in the watery grave, the person is "raised with Him through faith in the working of God." Biblical baptism is not a meritorious work on our part; the text says that God is the one who does the work. Our part is to have faith in His work. God promises to forgive our trespasses at baptism when we do it through faith. If one is baptized simply to become a church member, the action is not based on faith in God's working through baptism; therefore, it is meaningless. Since an infant is incapable of faith, its baptism is likewise meaningless. Many people who believe they are saved without baptism go ahead and get baptized simply to obey Jesus' command. However, such an action empties baptism of its true meaning; the person has no faith in the working of God to forgive trespasses at the moment of baptism. Biblical baptism is an act of faith in the saving power of Jesus' death on the part of a lost sinner who at that moment is united with Jesus' death.

Not only is baptism not a meritorious work, it is not a work at all on the part of the person being baptized. Speaking of the physical aspect, when we are baptized we do nothing; we yield our bodies to someone else to do the work.

# Buried with Christ Jesus in Baptism

## Baptism: the point of contact with the death of Christ

"Baptized into Christ . . .  
baptized into His death . . .  
buried with Him through baptism into death . . .  
as Christ was raised . . .  
so we also should walk in newness of life . . .  
we have been united together in the likeness of His death . . .  
**our** old man was crucified with Him,  
that the body of sin might be done away . . .  
we shall also live with Him."  
- Rom. 6:3-8

## **Baptism: an act of faith**

"Buried with  
Him in baptism,  
in which you  
also were raised  
with Him  
through faith in  
the working of  
God, who  
raised Him from  
the dead."  
- Col. 2:12

## **Baptism: a symbol with a two-fold reality of death, burial, and resurrection**

### Jesus Christ:

- He died for our sins
- His body was buried
- He rose and lives

### Repentant Believers:

• We die to sin  
• Our sinful self is buried  
• We rise to a new life

At the same time, spiritually we yield our souls to Jesus, confessing we cannot save ourselves—only He can do it. When we are baptized according to Scripture, we are confessing that we merit nothing, admitting our inability to save ourselves, and confessing our need to be saved by Christ.

Far from being a meritorious work, baptism is an act of deep faith. That must be why so many stumble over it. Just as many worldly persons have a hard time accepting a blood sacrifice as the means of forgiving sin; likewise, many religious persons have a hard time accepting water as having any relationship to salvation. The former want to be saved without blood, the latter without water. Nevertheless, Scripture teaches that in baptism we are buried with Jesus; we are "baptized into His death," thus contacting His blood. At the moment of baptism, we are "born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). Decades after Jesus spoke these words, the apostle John wrote by inspiration: "And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one" (1 John 5:8). God united blood and water.

### **Really Calling on the Name of the Lord**

What does it mean—biblically—to call on the name of the Lord? After Jesus' ascension into heaven, what examples do we have in the New Testament of people calling upon the name of the Lord?

The first case is found in Acts 2 just ten days after Jesus returned to heaven. Peter, having been baptized in the Holy Spirit, preached the gospel as an accomplished fact for the first time in history. In his sermon he quoted a text from Joel:

And it shall come to pass  
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD  
Shall be saved (Acts 2:21).

As Peter preached, his listeners became so convicted in their

hearts, believing all that Peter was saying, that they cried out "to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37). Did Peter say, "There is nothing you can do; Jesus did it all"? No, he did not. Did Peter say, "Receive Jesus into your heart"? No, he did not. Did Peter say, "Pray this prayer with me"? No, he did not.

What did Peter say? "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). What did the people do? "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (2:41). Peter first told the people to call on the name of the Lord to be saved. Then he told those who believed to repent and be baptized to be saved. Therefore, faith, repentance, and baptism must be the real way to call on the name of the Lord for salvation.

If there is any doubt, Acts 22:16 should clear it up. This is the second case where the Scriptures specifically tell us what people did to call on the name of the Lord for salvation. Acts 22 contains one of three accounts of Paul's conversion; the others are in Acts 9 and 26. When Paul (then called Saul) encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, "He, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do'" (9:6). "Do" is not a bad word. Paul directly asked the Savior a "do" question. Jesus told him where to find out what he should do. Notice that Jesus neither saved Paul in that moment, nor did Jesus tell him how to be saved. Rather, Jesus told Paul where to go to get the right answer to his vital question.

According to Acts 9:8-12, Paul went to Damascus and fasted and prayed for three days, receiving a further vision. When Ananias arrived, he answered the "do" question. What did he tell Paul to do? "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Paul had already come to faith back on the road to Damascus. Paul must have already been deep in repentance

asking God for forgiveness during those three days. Now Paul was told what to do to be saved. Paul did not say a little two-minute prayer asking Jesus to come into his life. He had been praying for three days! If a prayer was ever the moment for receiving salvation in Christ, certainly Paul was already more than saved before Ananias ever arrived. However, just as Paul was not saved by seeing Jesus nor by his vision in Damascus, neither was he saved by three days of prayer and fasting. Ananias had come to tell Paul that it was time to stop praying; it was time to "be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." In baptism one calls on the name of the Lord for salvation.

Baptism is not a meritorious sacrament nor a work of righteousness by which someone earns salvation. On the contrary, it is a humble, obedient act of allowing oneself to be lowered into a watery grave. In baptism a repentant believer is calling upon the Lord for salvation through Jesus' grace, mercy, love, and blood. The two cases in Acts are the only two examples in Scripture that explain exactly what calling on the name of the Lord for salvation is. There is no example of just praying a prayer to invite Jesus into one's heart. If a person truly believes in Jesus and truly believes what Jesus says, that person will seek and accept salvation on Jesus' terms, not on a popular preacher's terms. We must not only believe the gospel, we must obey it. No heartfelt salvation prayer can exempt a sinner from the "flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who *do not obey the gospel* of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:8). The italics are mine, but the words are the Holy Spirit's.

How important is it to understand all of this? Listen to what the Savior himself said: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). This is in a context where Jesus says: "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (7:14). This is in a context where Jesus says: "Beware of

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false prophets" (7:15). This is in a context where Jesus says: "Everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand" (7:26). Calling out vocally or mentally to the Lord Jesus is not enough. Jesus said so! Inviting Jesus into one's heart is not enough. Jesus said: "He who does the will of My Father." Therefore, when Scripture says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved," it must be understood in a deeper and more meaningful sense than simply asking Jesus to save us.

### **Our Way or God's Way?**

From the beginning of time, men have approached God in their own way. Before Cain murdered his brother, he had a direct confrontation with God. He brought his own offering to God in his own way. "And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering" (Gen. 4:4-5). We do not know the details, but Cain and Abel certainly knew. What we do know is that Cain brought an offering to the Lord that the Lord did not accept. Thus, from the very beginning of the Bible, we are warned against approaching God on our own terms. We must approach God on His terms or not at all.

That is what Naaman had to learn. Naaman was a commander of the Syrian army. However, he had leprosy and greatly desired to be healed. He was willing to travel to be healed. He was willing to pay big money to be healed. Nevertheless, he was not willing to humble himself to be healed. Although he knew he had no power to heal himself, and although he had faith that a prophet of a foreign God could heal him, yet he had his own preconceived idea as to how the healing should take place. He was so set on his own idea and so averse to humbling himself that he actually went into a rage over the healing offered. He headed for home, unhealed.

The healing offered to Naaman was simple: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be

restored" (2Kings 5:10). Naaman had two problems with this instruction. First, because of nationalistic pride, he considered the rivers of his homeland far superior to those in the land of the enemy Israel. Second, he wanted to be treated with respect. The prophet of God, Elisha, had not even come out of his house to greet the commander. Rather, Elisha had sent a messenger who told Naaman to dip seven times in the Jordan. None of this fit Naaman's preconceived concept of how it would happen: "I said to myself, 'He [Elisha] will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy'" (5:11).

Fortunately for Naaman, he had some loving servants who cared enough for their master that they dared to challenge his unreasonable behavior. They said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" (5:13). To his credit, Naaman listened to his reasonable servants, dropped his preconceived prejudices, humbled himself, and went and dipped in the Jordan seven times. He was healed!

There is an amazing parallel between Naaman's case and the situation in modern times regarding salvation. Many people today realize they are lost sinners, they cannot cure themselves, and the "prophet of Israel," Jesus, is the only one with power to transform their lives. However, like Naaman, these people have their own preconceived ideas of how they can be saved. When they are told they need to dip in water to have their sins washed away, they get upset and say that water certainly can have nothing to do with salvation. On the other hand, when a preacher invites them to the front of the auditorium and places his hand on them to pray with them for salvation, they like the idea and feel very confident that God has taken away their sins.

A grave problem is that forgiveness of sins cannot be physically seen like cleansing from leprosy. Therefore, people can easily be deceived into thinking that, inasmuch as a

great preacher of God prayed the sinner's prayer with them, surely their sins have been forgiven. They are even deceived into *feeling* forgiven. However, feelings do not prove reality; rather feelings are a reaction to our perception of reality. The patriarch Jacob went into real grief when he believed false evidence that Joseph had been slain (Gen. 37:28-35). No one would suggest that Jacob's grief was proof of Joseph's death. Likewise, a feeling of forgiveness is no proof of forgiveness. Forgiveness occurs in God's mind; it is God who dictates when we are saved. Therefore, we need the humility that Naaman had when his servants talked with him. We need to listen while a servant of God reads the Word of God to us. We need to humble ourselves and come to Jesus on His terms, not on our own terms, nor on a famous preacher's terms.

Naaman's stubborn rebellion was prefaced with these words: "Indeed, I said to myself..." or, as it says in the old King James Version: "Behold, I thought..." This pinpoints the problem. "I said to myself; I thought." We have our own preconceived ideas. We think we know what God should do. However, as God declared through Isaiah many, many years ago:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.  
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9).

Central to our whole relationship with the Creator is the molding of our thoughts to His thoughts.

Was Naaman cleansed by meritorious works? Not at all. He was cleansed when he humbled himself and had enough faith in God to do it God's way. God's preconditions are simply a test of man's faith and humility. Scripture says of the Savior: "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). Did you catch that? Our dear Savior who died on the cross for our sins

was, in that very act, learning obedience. Do we dare think we can avail ourselves of His saving sacrifice without learning obedience in our own lives? As a matter of fact, the sacred text continues: "And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who *obey Him*" (italics mine). Baptism is not a human work to earn salvation. On the contrary, Scriptural baptism is the result of having a faith strong enough to humbly obey Jesus. Scriptural baptism is the result of repenting for doing things our way instead of God's way.

Today's popular sinner's prayer is a reenactment of the way Naaman thought he ought to be healed. Repentance and baptism are a reenactment of the way Naaman actually was healed. The "salvation prayer" is man's substitute for believer's baptism. Jesus never said, "He who believes and prays will be saved." However, He did say, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." We all have to decide if we will put our faith in the modern preacher and novelist or in the eternal Son of God.

Faith that is strong enough to lead to humble obedience is not only a condition for receiving initial forgiveness, but also a condition for remaining in Christ. Listen to the Holy Spirit speaking through Paul: "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). Is salvation by faith? Absolutely! Can anyone earn salvation? Absolutely not! Nevertheless, salvation is neither gained nor retained by a faith devoid of humility, repentance, obedience, and love. It is the Savior himself who said: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. . . Beware of false prophets" (Matt. 7:21, 15).

## Prophecy: the Great Miracle

"Lying oracles have been in the world; but all the wit and malice of men and devils cannot produce any such prophecies as are recorded in Scripture . . . You have the greatest and most striking of miracles in the series of Scripture-prophecies accomplished . . . and if the Scripture-prophecies are accomplished, the Scripture must be the word of God." - Thomas Newton, 636-37

"We have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place."  
(2 Pet. 1:19)

"For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation."  
(Heb. 2:2-3)

**Fulfillment of prophecy in the past  
is our reason to believe what  
God says about our future.**