

... Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mk. 1:14-5)

... how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

- the Apostle Paul  
(Acts 20:20-1)



## WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

"What must I do to be saved?" This was the question of the Philippian jailor to Paul and Silas. It is also the question of the ages, which demands a clear answer. Although the Bible gives a very clear answer in simple terms, people have incredibly confused and complicated the issue, because the biblical answer seems too simple.

Some say, "Believe and be baptized!" Others, "Believe and follow Christ!" "Repent and confess all your sins, believe in Christ, be baptized, and join the church!" still other insist. "Let go and let God!" "Pray through!" "Surrender to Christ!" "Repent and live a life of obedience to Christ!" Still others say that there is nothing you can do to be saved; just wait on God to give you the faith and assurance that you are among the elect! Some say "Deny yourselves and take up your cross in order to be saved." Others yet insist that we must keep the Mosaic Law, especially the sabbath. But the largest church organization in the world says it isn't so simple: "One must be christened, participate regularly in the mass, keeping on doing penance for sins, have a priest perform extreme unction just before death, and have relatives pay for masses to get out of purgatory." The late Pope was trusting in Mary's intercession.

The watchword of the Protestant Reformation was that salvation is by

grace through faith alone. What is meant by faith and what about all these other conditions added onto faith according to various ‘Christian’ groups? Did the Apostle Paul oversimplify the issue? Did Martin Luther?

The answer to all these questions is found in just one authoritative source—the Bible. Human opinion is useless, human reasoning hopeless, tradition even more confusing, and the varieties of human experience even more misleading! The only source for salvation-truth is God’s perfect self-revelation recorded in His inspired word.

From all the above confused and contradictory answers one might think that the Bible itself is confused and self-contradictory. However, the Bible’s answer is clear, harmonious, and simple—if only we can rid ourselves of our presuppositions, biases, and traditions, and come to God’s word with an open and “**honest heart**” (Lk. 8:15). A sequential journey through the New Testament helps to see what the text plainly indicates. The best inductive study is to go chronologically to see the progress of the revelation of God’s truth. It is best not to jump around from passage to passage, which frequently obscures the context.

### **John the Baptizer’s starting point (John 1:29)**

The herald of the Lord Jesus was given insight to sum up the essential foundation of salvation in one statement as he introduced the Messiah to the Israel, by saying, “**Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.**” In just one sentence he made clear that the Lord Jesus would be the fulfillment of all the Old Testament blood sacrifices. However, the fulfillment far exceeded the sacrifices pointing to Him. The shedding of blood to provide garments for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3), the Passover lambs slain to redeem the firstborn in Egypt (Ex. 12), the blood of the sacrificial animals sprinkled on the Mercy Seat— all were temporary provisions (Heb. 10:1-4). But John announced that *Christ’s sacrifice would completely take away the sins of the whole world.*

John tersely focused upon the two main issues of the ministry of Christ—*who He is and what He came to do.* Some people wonder why the Gospels say so little about what He came to do until the last months before His crucifixion. One answer is that the first issue, *who He is*, had to be made absolutely clear first. Only then, just before the cross He spelled why He came: “**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many**” (Mt. 20:28). Was this man just a prophet, a miracle worker, a human Messiah, a deceiver, an egomaniac, or was He really God incarnate? Israel had to face this issue *first.*

In the course of His ministry the Lord Jesus also focused upon the reality of sin in the nation Israel and among all peoples. Until the chosen people realized how sinful and apostate they had become, there was little point in His explaining the nature of His future sacrificial work on the cross.

## Repentance and faith

Mark describes the beginning of His ministry in this way: “**After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’**” (Mk. 1:14-5). This twofold demand of the Lord relates to the two issues just mentioned. Although there is much discussion about the nature of the kingdom of God, one thing that is sure is that it centers on the King, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The kingdom was at hand because the King had arrived (cf. Lk. 17:20-25). In the light of His arrival and the impending kingdom, Israel’s sin had to be faced and repented of. But they would not see any need to repent unless they believed in the Lord and His message, nor could they really believe in Him in the true sense unless they had repented of their sin, their false views of God, His word, and His Messiah. Repentance and true faith go hand in glove. Perhaps a better analogy is the two sides of a coin: repentance is tails, the negative side, and faith is heads, the positive side of the coin. The two sides make one coin. Years later Paul spoke of the essence of his message as, “**repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ**” (Acts 20:21 NAS). His message was the same! These two sides of the coin should be examined separately and then put back together. There is just one condition of salvation, one coin with two sides.

## The message of repentance

The Lord’s forerunner, John, after many silent centuries, had again voiced God’s demand to Israel for repentance: “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**” (Mt. 3:1). He spoke much about God’s judgment upon sin by exposing Israel’s sinful, hypocritical, and externalistic ways. His bold rebuke of King Herod’s adultery brought about his imprisonment. At that point the Lord Jesus took up John’s message in virtually identical language (Mt. 4:12, 17). But what does repentance mean? There are many misconceptions about its meaning current today, as in that day.

The Greek for repentance is *metanoia*, which means a change of mind, heart, will, attitude, or mind-set. The Jewish people needed to change their minds about themselves, both individually and corporately as a nation, about their sin, and about God and His demands upon the human race. It is obvious that coming to faith in Christ must involve a real change of attitude.

The Sermon on the Mount was the Lord’s first major effort to change the mind and attitude of the Jewish nation. In Matthew 5, He exposed the false Rabbinic misinterpretations of the Mosaic Law by the contrasting expression, “**You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you**” (Mt. 5:21-2; 27-8; 31-2; 33-4; 38-9; 43-4). He exposed the hypocritical externalism of publically giving alms, praying, and fasting so as to be seen of men. He exposed their ‘theologically correct’ materialism (Mt. 6:19-34). He warned especially about the false prophets and leaders of Israel, who used God’s name but were counterfeits (Mt. 7:15-23). Throughout His teaching the Lord warned about the

arrogant, self-righteous religious leaders, who were leading the nation astray (Mt. 23). Thus, the Sermon on the Mount was a true, higher exposition of the Mosaic Law to help the Jewish people see themselves as sinners before God and in need of His salvation. The most shocking indictment he made was: **“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven”** (Mt. 5:20).

There were very few really righteous in Israel and only a small godly remnant of believing, righteous Jews, such as Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah, etc. The majority were unregenerate sinners who needed to repent. Through the ministry of John the Baptizer, Christ’s early disciples, such as Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Nathaniel, had become part of this godly, repentant remnant (Jn. 1). But even the pre-eminent teacher in Israel, Nicodemus, needed to be born again (Jn. 3:1-36). When the Pharisees and Scribes grumbled at the Lord’s connection with sinners at Matthew Levi’s feast, He said: **“It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance”** (Lk. 9:31-2). Using two incidents in which people were tragically killed as an example, He later pressed His point, **“But unless you repent, you too will all perish”** (Lk. 13:3, 5). When Zaccheus, the crooked tax collector, came to repentance, He affirmed, **“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”** (Lk. 19:10). Thus, repentance involves a radical change of mind or attitude about sin, self, and the Savior.

One misconception about repentance which developed in the church after the time of the Apostles was that it meant a change of direction in one’s lifestyle, turning over a new leaf in life. Instead, repentance is a change of *mind*, and conversion is a change of *direction or lifestyle*. When one is driving down the interstate, repentance is the realization that one is going in the wrong direction. Conversion is when one finds an exit and make a u-turn. They are related, but distinct. This is important because the Pharisees had the idea that as long as things looked good on the outside, one was all right with God. But the Lord Jesus was more concerned with the issues of the heart (Prov. 4:23), as the starting place for dealing with the external lifestyle. Unfortunately, many legalistic scholars today have fallen into the same confusion by equating repentance and conversion.<sup>A</sup> This same mindset eventuated in the Roman Catholic Douay translation, “do penance.” It implies that repentance is something done externally.

Another erroneous notion is that repentance means sorrow for sin. This emphasizes the emotional dimension, whereas the Greek word puts the emphasis upon the mind and will of mankind. Paul exposes the error of this notion in writing to the Corinthian church: **“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death”** (2 Cor. 7:10). Although *godly sorrow* can bring true repentance, sorrow in itself is

---

A. Unfortunately, two major theological dictionaries have fallen into this error by skewing the data, probably because of a legalistic, externalistic mind-set of the article authors. See Appendix G in BCAA.

not repentance. This error is also connected with the confusion between repentance and remorse. Remorse is essentially being sorry for getting caught in sin. This is what happened to Judas Iscariot. When things didn't work out the way he had planned, he was remorseful and went out and hung himself. Quite in contrast, Simon Peter repented of his denial of the Lord Jesus and was restored (Jn. 21). Weeping and mourning is not a condition for being saved, since God is ready to save any sinner who comes in repentant faith.

### The appeal to believe the good news by trusting Christ

The positive side of the coin is to believe the good news, which in essence is to trust Christ. Just as repentance is emphasized in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), just so believing is emphasized in John's Gospel. The active verb *pisteuein* (to believe) is found 96 times in this Gospel, but the noun *pistis* (faith) does not occur, although frequently found in the epistles. Unfortunately, in English, the noun (faith) and the verb (believe) are from two different roots, but the Greek words come from the same root. Their meaning in Greek is a lot stronger than the words belief and believe, which have been badly watered down in English—“I believe it will rain today.” It would be far better to use the word ‘trust’ both as a noun and verb to more faithfully render the meaning of the original.

John gives a clear picture of the meaning. In the prologue of his Gospel, he equates it with ‘receiving’ Christ: “**Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God—**” (Jn. 1:12, NIV). Speaking to Israel's premier teacher, the Lord made trust in Himself the condition for receiving eternal life (Jn. 3:15-16). John concludes the narrative with the words: “**Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him**” (Jn. 3:36, NIV). There is another Greek word used in this verse which has caused some discussion, the verb, *apeithein* (rejects) is translated “believeth not” in the KJV and “does not obey” in the NAS translation. Since the positive verb, *peithein* has the idea of being persuaded, one authoritative Greek lexicon rightly supports the KJV and NIV against the NAS. John is not talking about obedience here, but faith and rejection. This indicates that true faith involves persuasion.<sup>B</sup>

The Jewish leaders began to oppose the Lord early in His ministry, eliciting this wonderful claim from His mouth: “**In very truth, anyone who gives heed to what I say and puts his trust in him who sent me has hold of eternal life, and does not come up for judgement, but has already passed from death to life**” (Jn. 5:24, NEV). Note the wonderful assurance which true faith engenders in the heart. It is the assurance of a present reality (**has hold of eternal life**), a confi-

---

B. The BAG lexicon states, p. 82: “Since, in the view of the early Christians, the supreme disobedience was a refusal to believe their gospel, *apeitheo* may be restricted in some passages to the meaning, *disbelieve, be an unbeliever.*”

dence for the future (**does not come up for judgement**) based upon a past event (**has already passed from death to life**). This is the verse the Spirit used in my life over fifty years ago to bring me into the assurance of eternal life, which has never left me.

The narrative of the Samaritan woman helps: **“Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life”** (Jn. 4:13-14). Christ used the symbolism of drinking living water to explain that believing is like drinking, or appropriating the living water for one’s self (Jn. 4:10, 13-4). He used this same symbolism extensively in the bread of life discourse:

**I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ... I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day** (Jn. 6:35, 53-4).

This is the same symbolism as with the Samaritan woman. ‘Eating’ symbolizes coming to Christ, and ‘drinking’ portrays saving faith. One must appropriate or partake of Christ; it is not just mere intellectual assent to certain truths. Later at the feast of Tabernacles, in that most dramatic scene, He reinforced this essential idea: **“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him’”** (Jn. 7:37-8).

Matthew recorded a unique invitation, which amplifies the Lord’s reference in Jn 6:35 to coming to Him as an aspect of believing: **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”** (Mt. 11:28). Notice the universality of this invitation. In the context, He had just denounced the towns of Israel which were unrepentant despite the flood of light of His presence to which they had been privileged (Mt. 11:20-24). This implies that the invitation is now extended to the Gentiles as well as the Jews, which means the whole world of people burdened with sin. This brings us back to where we began— John 1:29, **“the sin of the world.”**

Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, He had exhorted the nation to **“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it”** (Mt. 7:13-14). John records His words in a later discourse about the gate to the sheep pen: **“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture”** (Jn. 10:9). Note the universality of the invitation, but also its exclusivity. Christ is the only gate or door to eternal life. Just before this He had made it plain to the Pharisees: **“I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins”** (Jn. 8:24, NIV).

### **Conversion is the result of repentant faith and the new birth.**

The Greek words for conversion (*strephein, epistrephein*) refer to a change of direction, used in the literal sense of “turning oneself around” (Mk. 5:30; 8:33) or metaphorically of a spiritual turning toward God. It can refer to both a change of the direction of one’s life and of a change of lifestyle. Conditioned on repentant faith, God gives the new birth as a total work of the Spirit in imparting new, divine life to the spiritually dead. The outward result of this is conversion. God’s way is to start on the inside with the new birth, which then begins to impact the outward life in conversion.

The major error of the Scribes and Pharisees of Christ’s day was externalism, without a change of heart. Many legalistic professing Christians today have fallen into the same tragic error. The Lord Jesus did not actually say much about conversion; He left that to His Apostles to clarify. The major issue throughout most of His ministry was— who is He?

### **The centrality of the cross and the resurrection**

It was not until the last months of His ministry that the Lord Jesus began to speak explicitly about the cross. Beginning at Caesarea Philippi, He began to predict a dozen times that He must go up to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and rise from the dead (Mt. 16:21; Lk. 9:22). He only explained its significance in Mt. 20:28: “**Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.**” This makes it clear that the cross is the basis of the salvation He had been offering.

However, before the Lord could talk about the cross, He first had to deal with Israel’s sin by explaining the true meaning of the Mosaic Law and His higher standard of morality (in the Sermon on the Mount) for the impending kingdom of righteousness which He was offering to Israel in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Then He had to help them to understand who He was—God incarnate in human flesh. Only then, upon their rejection of Him as righteous king and His righteous kingdom, could He press on to Jerusalem and the cross. This helps to explain why the form in which His message was proclaimed over most of His ministry, especially as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, seems quite different from the message as proclaimed by the Apostles in Acts and the epistles. But the core of the message is the same: people must repent and then turn to Him as God’s Messiah in faith, that is, as King and Savior. But before the proffered kingdom could be inaugurated, first He must suffer and die according to God’s eternal plan.

As a consequence of His deity, the Lord also claimed to be the only way of salvation, contrary to the pluralistic ideas in vogue today: “**Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’**” (Jn. 14:6).<sup>C</sup>

---

C. Two prominent evangelical leaders, when challenged on the Larry King program in the summer of 2005, waffled about Christ being the only way of salvation, and thus “gave away the store.”

John recorded a number of incidents and teachings which pointed to the cross and resurrection, first in more symbolic language, and later more explicitly. At the first cleansing of the temple at the first Passover of His ministry the Lord Jesus said to the Jewish leaders: **“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days”** (Jn. 2:19). At the second Passover, after feeding the multitude He said, **“I am the bread of life; ... This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”** (Jn. 6:35a, 51c).

At the feast of Dedication (Chanukah) four months before the cross, the Lord described Himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep (Jn. 10:11-18). Then, as the last Passover and the crucifixion approached, in connection with the raising of Lazarus, He said to Martha, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies”** (Jn. 11:25). Then during passion week, in reference to the Gentiles who wanted to see Him, He said, **“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ... But I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself”** (Jn. 12:24, 32). In addition, there are about a dozen explicit predictions the Lord made of His passion.

### **The gospel in the Lord's final orders**

The Lord Jesus had laid the foundation for the “Great Commission” in His exhortation to the fishermen: **“Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men”** (Mt. 4:19). During the forty days after His resurrection and before He ascended on high, He commanded: **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”** (Mt. 28:18-20a). The incident later in Jerusalem, which Luke recorded, explains how they were to make disciples:

**This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (Lk. 24:47-9).**

### **The gospel in apostolic preaching**

Another excellent way to get at the heart of the salvation message is to examine the apostolic preaching in Acts. Most of the proclamation is in the words of Peter or Paul, and in Luke's explanations along the way.

***Peter's messages to Israel.*** After explaining the phenomena connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter moved right on to the cross (Acts 2:23), the resurrection, and ascension as proof that Jesus is both Lord and Messiah (2:24-36). Many in the crowd came under conviction as Christ had promised in John 16:8-11: **“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart**

and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). Peter’s response needs to be translated more clearly from the Greek:<sup>D</sup> “**All of you [pl.] must imperatively repent (and let him [sing.] be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ), for the forgiveness of your [pl.] sins; and you [pl.] will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 2:38, Olson translation). Verse 41 makes clear that only those who had received the word were baptized; baptism of itself was of no saving value. It is God who does the saving, and nothing man does can contribute to our salvation: “**And the Lord was adding their number daily those who were being saved**” (2:47b).

As Peter’s second opportunity came through the healing of the lame man, he focused on the cross and resurrection (Acts 3:13-18) and then exhorted: “**Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...**” (3:19). They were on the verge of a great revival, if only the nation would repent and turn to God. Tragically, instead they arrested the Apostles. Still Luke says, “**But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand**” (4:4, NIV). Notice how repentance and faith are used interchangeably, and there is no mention of baptism here. Note also that repentance is prior to conversion. Some wrongly assume that because repentance and conversion are connected by ‘and,’ they are synonymous.

It is exceedingly important in this pluralistic age to note that the Apostle Peter confirmed the Lord’s claim to be the only way of salvation: “**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved**” (Acts 4:12, NIV). When brought before the Sanhedrin, Peter did not waver from the same message:

**God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him (5:31-2).**

Some have misused this verse to teach that God gives repentance as a gift to some elect individuals. However, the context is clear that Peter is talking about God giving the nation Israel the *opportunity* to repent and be forgiven. Others have misused this verse to claim that only obedient Christians receive the Holy Spirit after their conversion. A unique verb, *peitharchein* is used here, speaking of the submission to Christ’s authority implicit in repentant faith. Obviously, the Jewish rulers were not submitting to Christ’s authority as Prince and Savior, whereas all true believers have submitted.

At his martyrdom, Stephen raised the same issue: “**You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 7:51). Salvation is not through some irresistible

---

D. The standard translations have not made clear the marked shift from the second person plural imperative (repent) to the third person singular imperative (let him be baptized), which is sometimes called a cohortative. Since the verb ‘to repent’ is in the plural, as is the forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit, these connect and are not conditioned upon baptism, which alone is in the singular.

work of the Spirit upon some elect group. Human beings have a free will to resist the work of the Spirit, as most do.

Luke records how Philip went down to the Samaritans to follow up the ministry of the Lord Jesus there (Jn. 4): **“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, both men and women”** (Acts 8:12).

The importance of human response to the message as the key factor in conversion is confirmed by Peter’s miracle in Lydda of healing a paralytic named Aeneas: **“All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord”** (Acts 9:35). This kind of astonishing result has sometimes been experienced by missionaries even to the present, as whole tribes and villages come together to Christ. Missiologist Donald McGavran has termed this phenomenon “people-movement conversion.” There are some humanly caused circumstances which usually lead up to such mass responses. This is hard to harmonize with ideas of God only saving some few sovereignly elect people. These ideas will be studied subsequently (Chaps. 20 - 23).

Most significant is Peter’s message to the first Gentile converts after Pentecost, Cornelius and his household. After bearing witness to the cross and resurrection, Peter said, **“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name”** (Acts 10:43, NIV). It should be noted that all these Gentile relatives and close friends, having been prepared by Cornelius’ influence (v. 24), received the gift of the Holy Spirit at the point at which they came to faith, neither before nor afterward, as some erroneously teach. Extreme Calvinists teach that the regenerating work of the Spirit precedes faith, and Pentecostals deny that we receive the Spirit *when* we believe (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Rom. 8:9). Peter based his conclusion, that even these Gentiles should receive baptism, on the fact that they had already received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-8). Clearly, baptism did not qualify them for salvation or the gift of the Spirit.

In Jerusalem when Peter defended his baptism of Gentiles he reaffirmed that their faith was the condition of receiving the Spirit of God:

**‘So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God!’ When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has even granted the Gentiles repentance unto life’** (Acts 11:17-18, NIV).

Note that believing and repenting are used here interchangeably as the condition of receiving the Spirit, the giver of eternal life. In their response, the Apostles and elders were indicating that now God was giving Gentiles the *opportunity* to repent and receive eternal life.<sup>E</sup>

Accordingly, Luke follows this up with the narrative of the incorporation

---

E. Some suppose that this shows that repentance is a direct gift of God to the elect, but this ignores the context of the passage. The issue was Jews and Gentiles. God didn’t give all Gentiles repentance.

of Gentiles into the church in the great cosmopolitan city of Antioch of Syria: “... men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:20-21, NIV). This unique character of the church was manifest through the incorporation of Gentile converts, so much so that it was there that the disciples were *first* called Christians (11:26).

**Paul’s missionary tours.** Luke then narrates the progress of the gospel out into the broader Gentile world under the ministry of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary tour. Their sermon in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch is recorded at length. After preaching the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, the Apostles said, “**Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses**” (Acts 13:38-39, NIV). Both Jews and devout Gentile converts to Judaism responded to the message and the Apostles were invited back. On the next Sabbath, when a crowd gathered to hear the message, the leaders of the synagogue opposed them, causing the Apostles to say: “**It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles....**” Luke reports, “**When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and all who had devoted themselves to eternal life believed**” (13:46, 48, Olson translation).<sup>F</sup> As the Apostles moved on to Iconium, Luke again contrasts the great number of Jews and Gentiles who believed with the Jewish leadership, “**who refused to believe...**” (14:2).

At the Jerusalem church council, in defending Gentile salvation by grace through faith alone, Peter was very explicit (Acts 15:7-9, 11, NAS):

**Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them [by] giving the Holy Spirit, just as he also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.... But we believe that we are saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus, in the same way they also are.**

On the second missionary tour, Paul and Silas got a positive response in Philippi. God opened the heart of Lydia, who was already worshiping Him by customarily meeting with Jewish women at a place of prayer.<sup>G</sup> After

---

F. The perfect participle, *tetagmenoi*, can be either middle or passive voice. Since the Apostles had just referred to the Jews’ rejecting and considering themselves unworthy of eternal life, the middle voice reflexive meaning makes much better sense here. The verb *tassein* is used in 1 Cor. 16:15 in the sense of being devoted to something. BAGD, p. 991, and Alford, *Gk. Testament*, II, 153-4.

G. This is not an indication of irresistible grace, as some suppose, because her heart was already right with God, and she like other godly Jews just needed to be moved into the New Testament church through the hearing of the gospel message.

baptism she called herself “a believer” (Acts 16:15). The story of the conversion of the Philippian jailor has rightly been emphasized in gospel presentations. The incredible testimony of the Apostles praying and singing hymns at midnight in prison with their feet in stocks, must have brought conviction to the jailor, reinforced by the earthquake, causing him to cry out, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Since he had already had a change of mind, their response did not leave anything out: “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household,**” (Acts 16:30-31, NAS). They told the whole truth. Note that it was *after* they had believed and were saved, that those who had believed were also baptized (16:32-34).

When the Apostles came to Thessalonica, they went into the synagogue, “...and for three sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead” (Acts 17:2-3). Luke says that “some of them were persuaded,” in describing the conversion of many devout Greeks and prominent women. Human persuasion plays a significant part in people coming to faith. After the success of this persuasive evangelism had caused a riot, the Apostles arrived in the Jewish synagogue in Berea. Luke records:

**Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men (Acts 17:11-12, NAS).<sup>H</sup>**

As Bible teachers have long stressed, we must always ask what ‘therefore’ is *there for*. Luke is clearly showing cause and effect. There is a connection between the Bereans’ mind-set and the fact that many of them came to saving faith. In making this connection, Luke is simply reflecting the Lord Jesus’ own explanation of His parable of the four soils (Lk. 8:15).

When forced out of Berea, Paul left Silas and Timothy there and found a great opportunity for witness on Mars Hill in Athens among the Greek philosophers. He reminded them that God created mankind “**that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him.... Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,**...” (Acts 17:27, 30). Luke goes on to tell how only a few believed there, possibly because of their proud philosophical mind-set (17:32-34).

Finding a synagogue in the cosmopolitan city of Corinth, Paul again reasoned with the people there and tried “**to persuade Jews and Greeks**” (18:4). The results were most encouraging. “**Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized**” (Acts 18:8). Toward the end of his eighteen-month ministry there Paul also saw the conversion of the new synagogue leader, Sosthenes (Acts 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:1).

---

H. The NIV translation carelessly omits the ‘therefore,’ although the word *oun* is clearly in the Greek text.

With such great success in Corinth it is no surprise that Paul continued the same persuasive approach in the great religious center of Asia, Ephesus (18:19). He left Priscilla and Aquila there, whose witness was greatly reinforced by the arrival of Apollos, an eloquent and zealous man, who had only a rudimentary knowledge of Christ's person and work. After Priscilla and Aquila 'brought him up to speed' on the whole Christian message, he went over to Corinth and **"greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ"** (Acts 18:27-28).

Sometime later on his third missionary tour Paul, coming back through Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen the churches, arrived in Ephesus. His interaction with a dozen disciples of John there reinforces the same pattern. Since they had even less understanding of New Testament salvation than Apollos had, Paul had to move them into the full New Testament reality of the Church-age message and experience: **"John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus"** (Acts 19:4).<sup>1</sup> When they received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of Paul's hands, they were transitioned from being godly Jews to becoming part of the New Testament body of Christ. Paul re-baptized them to signify this transition (19:5-6). Since they were already saved people, baptism did not contribute to their salvation in the least, but God confirmed it by giving them the Holy Spirit at this point. Since they were part of this decades-long transition to the full New Testament church, their experience was an exception to the normal order, which is the giving of the Spirit at conversion.

Luke again emphasizes Paul's confrontational witness: **"And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God"** (Acts 19:8). After completing his ministry in the two Greek provinces, Paul returned to Asia and met with the elders of the Ephesian church. His summary of his method and message in Acts 20:20-21 totally confirms this:

**... how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

As we journeyed through the Gospels and Acts, we saw repentance and faith linked in Mark 1:15 and *continuously used almost interchangeably throughout*, and now Paul confirms that both are integrally connected. Thus when Ryrie speaks of "repentant faith," it is an accurate representation of the biblical message. This seems so obvious that one wonders how some can emphasize one to the exclusion of the other.

---

1. Dispensationally speaking, these men were still in the pre-Pentecost epoch as godly Jews and needed to hear the complete message of the cross and resurrection in order to receive the Holy Spirit and be baptized into the Church.

Perhaps one further point will help to clarify the existing confusion. It seems clear that while the message was being proclaimed to Jews (as in the Synoptic Gospels and early chapter of Acts), the emphasis was upon repentance. As the message went out to the Gentiles (John's Gospel, later Acts, Romans, etc.), the emphasis is upon faith, trust, and believing. The Apostles contextualized\* the message for their differing hearers. Missionaries have learned that as they go into diverse cultures, the way of communicating the message must be adapted for the particular culture.

### Clarifying other issues

It becomes clear through our journey that the message is totally consistent and simple, that repentance and faith are the two aspects of the one condition for the receiving of forgiveness of sins, the new birth and its concomitant eternal life, all based upon the death and resurrection of Christ. *Baptism, when it is mentioned, is always subsequent to salvation and a part of full discipleship.* This pattern is also confirmed in the message which the Apostles preached and wrote (cf. Ch. 18). However, some question whether the Lord's very stringent discipleship teachings are not conditions for salvation. Chapter 11 is an examination of the three major contexts to answer this more controversial question: Matthew 10:37-38; 16:24-8=Luke 9:23-7; and Luke 14:25-34.

### Conclusions

This journey through the Gospels and Acts should make it abundantly clear that repentance and faith are both necessary for salvation, but *not as separate conditions*. They are always integrally connected like the two sides of a coin, as confirmed by the constant interchangeability of terminology .

It should never be thought for a moment that water baptism should be added to simple repentant faith as necessary for salvation. If that were so, the biblical writers were guilty of constant, serious errors in omitting reference to baptism in the overwhelming majority of passages.

Nor may any other condition be added to the simple New Testament condition of repentant faith. If it seems too simple to many, it is because they are 'hung up' on the legalistic human desire to make a material contribution to their own salvation. But as this investigation will show, salvation is not in the least dependent upon human performance. It is solely by the gracious, unmerited favor of God through Jesus Christ.