

# Faith Comes By Hearing

## What does it mean to hear?

When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus Christ responded by saying, *“Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these”* (**Mark 12:28-31**). Inherent in obedience to this law is hearing its words. Without the desire to listen to the message of the Gospel, our actions in this life are worthless. We are told throughout the Bible that *“he who has ears, let him hear...”* (**Matthew 11:15, Revelation 13:9**). Furthermore, Jesus states in **Luke 8:21**, *“My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.”*

With so many verses on *“hearing the word of God,”* we ought to consider what it truly means to do this. Can we hear and not obey? Can we please God without hearing? Can we accomplish anything in life without hearing instructions? Most importantly, is hearing an act of salvation? By hearing, of course, I do not mean the literal, physical act of receiving messages through the human ear. Otherwise, those who are deaf would never be able to obey the Gospel. In the truest sense of the word’s spiritual application, “hearing” means inviting the Word of God into your heart, either through reading the Bible or listening to its words spoken out loud. After all, *“When you read you can understand [the apostle Paul’s] insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit”* (**Ephesians 3:4-5**). And also, *“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ”* (**Romans 10:17**). One writer said, *“We once saw an educated mute, who was quite an intelligent member of the church of God. We wrote on a slip of paper and handed him the following question: ‘Sir, Paul says faith comes by hearing;’ as you cannot hear, how came your faith?’ He was a good penman, and quickly wrote the following answer: ‘Though I can not hear, thank God I can read. I heard the Gospel like I heard the question you asked me. John says, “Many other signs and miracles Jesus did which are not written in this book; but these are written that you might believe...” I read, understood, believed, and obeyed what was written.’ We were pleased with his answer, for it evinced that he knew much more about the faith required by the Gospel than many who have ears to hear but seem not to understand what faith is, or how it comes”* (**The Gospel Plan Of Salvation**, Brents, 214). It becomes quite clear from these verses that hearing is an absolutely essential part of our walk toward salvation. If we do not

ingest the message of the Bible we will never be able to cultivate faith, which leads us to live righteous lives. Without hearing, we can never come to fully understand the mystery of Christ – the mystery being the free gift of salvation to all people who choose to accept the cross of our Lord (**Ephesians 3:6**).

When asked if hearing is a part of the steps of salvation, we cannot deny the fact that no person was ever saved without hearing the Word. In fact, **2 Thessalonians 1:8** makes it clear that those who never come to know God – either by ignorance or rebellion – will have retribution dealt out to them. Some will be appalled at the sweeping application of this verse, however, stating that so many have never heard, or that so many people never had the chance to hear. In response, we must always remember that the Gospel is a powerful book, and that its words are available for every person. *“But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; ‘Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world’”* (**Romans 10:18**). There is no excuse for any person not to hear the Word – after all, let us remember that Jesus said anybody who has ears has an obligation to hear! In numerous accounts of people being saved, hearing and believing the Gospel plays an essential part. On the day of Pentecost in **Acts 2:37**, the people *“heard”* Peter preaching and were pricked to the heart. This soul searching never would have happened had they not heard Peter’s words. In Christ’s prayer to the Father, He prayed for people who would believe in Him by hearing the words of the apostles (**John 17:20**). The faith of the Gentiles came in the same way, for Peter said, *“Brethren, you know that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe”* (**Acts 15:7**). In **Acts 18:8**, many of the Corinthians, after hearing, believed and were baptized.

### **“I Choose Not To Hear”**

But what if we choose to not hear? Can we not just plead ignorance by plugging our ears and crying, “I did not hear?” That this argument is self-defeating seems clear, for ignoring a plain truth does not make it vanish! To close our ears when a teacher assigns homework does not expunge that assignment from the grade book, does it? When our employer orders the completion of a job in such and such a time, does turning and fleeing from him remove all our responsibilities?

Can we make cancer disappear by plugging our ears when the doctor comes to tell us the bad news? Then how, my friends, can anybody think that ignoring God will detach us from obligation to His Law? Consider, for example, the Jewish leaders who stopped their ears and cried aloud to keep from hearing the sermon of Stephen in **Acts 7:57**. Did ignorance save the Israelites in the

wilderness? Surely not, or else the Lord never would have pronounced a judgment against them in **Psalm 95:7-11** and **Hebrews 3**. There are many reasons why people choose not to hear the Gospel – for some of the same reasons we choose not to listen to the good instruction of our parents, the warnings on a label, the posted speed limits, the disclaimer before a monster truck show, or the sermon of a preacher. How is it that so many people can “hear” these warnings, but never truly ingest them? Perhaps it is from stubbornness – some choose not to hear the Gospel because they do not want to admit they are wrong. *“But they refused to pay attention, and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears from hearing” (Zechariah 7:11)*. Others will not hear the good news because they do not believe they need it. It is the same when we try to tell a prosperous person that he needs to set aside for a rainy day, purchase insurance, or share his wealth. *“I spoke to you in your prosperity; but you said, ‘I will not listen.’ This has been your practice from your youth, that you have not obeyed My voice” (Jeremiah 22:21)*.

### **Hearing must be followed by obedience**

**Matthew 7:24-27** is one of the most helpful scriptures when discussing how necessary it is for us to hear and obey the word of God. *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine...”* All people hear the words of Christ, for the message was designed to be spread unto all mankind (**Matthew 28:18-20**). Not only that, but when we read the words of Christ, we are not simply reading the wisdom of an ancient thinker, or an influential teacher, but of God Himself. *“He who hears you hears Me, and He who hears Me hears Him who sent Me” (Luke 10:16)*.

*“...And acts upon them...”* It is not enough to simply hear the message and do nothing. Hearing by itself never helped anybody! Similarly, reading a warning label on a medicine bottle is not enough to prevent an abuse of that product, for we must also heed the directions for how much and how often the medicine is to be administered. I cannot possibly pass a class if I hear the directions of the teacher but decide to follow my own educational course. I cannot please my boss if I hear him assign me a task, but then tailor the job to my own desires. We must hear and act, friends! *“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was” (James 1:22-25)*. How ridiculous would it be to forget the details of your own face? Yet this is such an appropriate analogy for the person who hears and does not act. *“James was clarifying the point that mere listening to the Word of God was not sufficient to fulfill the believer’s obligation. It is possible to*

*attend a worship service where the Scripture is read and suppose one's responsibilities have all been met.. The term 'hearer' has been found outside the New Testament of an attendant at a lecture but distinguished from a disciple. It suggests, therefore, a more casual listener or auditor. Unless the hearer of the Word responds with appropriate deeds, he is deceiving himself. He has deluded himself into thinking he has received the Word, when all he has done is let himself have a superficial encounter" (**Faith That Works**, Kent, 66).*

*"...May be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock." The effectual doer of the word is just like a wise man who did all the things necessary to ensure the safety and stability of his house. The question that we must ask ourselves, therefore, is on what kind of foundation have we been building? To hear the Gospel is to come in contact with the very Word of the Lord – the written scriptures that lead us to Heaven, and instruct us in every good work (**2 Peter 1:3**). *"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock."* No matter what life throws at us, God will pull us through if we trust His Word and read it. After all, the Gospel *"is the power of God unto salvation"* (**Romans 1:16**), so there is no other source of wisdom, no other collection of poems, no other book in the world that can possibly be as spiritually beneficial as the Bible.*

*"And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them..."* First, notice that those to whom the Bible applies are clearly defined as *"everyone."* There is not a single person in this world who is not obligated to hear the Gospel and act upon it. *"Having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent..."* (**Acts 17:30**). Second, we have free will when it comes to acting upon the Gospel. We are not forced into salvation, but are given a willing opportunity to accept the gift of God. In the same way that the wise man acted prudently in building his house upon the rock, the foolish man has just as much choice about his foundation. So he chooses the sand! *"...Will be compared to a foolish man who built his house upon the sand."* Sand may seem like an appropriate foundation at first – it is, after all, much easier to transport, to dig up, and to shape. One can very quickly plant the feet of a house into an area of loose sand. *"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall."* The easier it is to plant a foundation, though, the easier it is to uproot it!

### **The Nature of Faith**

So what is faith? What is required of a saving faith? **John 6:47** tells us that *"he who believes has eternal life."* **Acts 15:9** teaches, *"He made no distinction*

*between us and them cleansing their hearts by faith.*” It is argued from verses like this, as well as dozens of others, that salvation happens at the moment of belief. But is there more to saving faith than just believing? There are others who believed, but were not saved. In **John 12:42-43** some of the rulers believed in Christ but were unwilling to confess him before their peers. Now, no matter what one might say about their quality of belief, they did believe. If faith only saves us, then their faith should have been enough, and the grace of God strong enough to cover their lack of devotion. But what does Jesus say about those who are unwilling to confess Him before men? *“Everyone therefore who shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven”* (**Matthew 10:32-33**). But what about Peter, you might ask? Even he denied Christ at one point in a moment of weakness. Well, that is true, and had he died at that moment our previous verse would lead us to believe that he would have been condemned. There were other times when Peter had moments of weakness, and Paul clearly states that the apostle was condemned before repentance (**Galatians 2:11**).

There are demons who believe in Christ, also, and who are willing to confess His power (**James 2:19**). Their faith does not seem to help them. One may object, however, by saying that their faith was just “mental assent” and that they did not demonstrate their faith with obedience. So wait! Obedience is necessary for salvation too. But this is where the “faith only” people sorely contradict themselves. Is it belief only or is it something more? The demons believed but did not obey and are thus condemned, so why does that not apply to humans as well? Either it is faith only or it is faith and works together that save. Make up your minds!

What is even more interesting in our discussion of the definition of saving faith is to take into account the fact that faith is a work itself. *“Those who teach that men are not saved by any kind of works involve themselves in great difficulty. While objecting that man is saved by any kind of work, they teach that man is saved by ‘faith only.’ And the Bible teaches that faith is a work. ‘This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent’* (**John 6:29**). *Faith is a work of God; they teach man is saved by ‘faith only’ without any kind of works, so they deny man is saved by that by which they say he is saved”* (O’Neal, p. 152).

It is by hearing the Gospel that we gain faith (**Romans 10:17**). So will you hear now what the Lord says? *“He who believes and is baptized shall be saved”* (**Mark 16:16**).



# Confession

There are many misconceptions about the act of confessing. Some believe that salvation comes by confession alone, while others do not consider it an act of salvation at all. As for confession of sins, a number of religious groups teach that one must go to a confessional to gain forgiveness for sins committed. Confession has become such a cheapened act as a result of the false doctrines surrounding it. Consider the “Salvation Prayer,” as offered by the website of the Greenwood Baptist Church in Valdosta, Georgia: *“Dear Jesus, I believe that You died on the cross for my sins and that You arose from the grave. I now ask you to forgive me of my sins and to save my soul. Amen.”* Check almost any denominational website, and a similar offer will exist for those wishing to be saved on the spot. Similarly, turn on many of the religious television programs, and at the end of the televangelist’s sermon, he or she will lead the audience (both live and television viewers) through a “sinner’s prayer.” Upon confession, immediate salvation occurs for all participants. Beyond that, absolution of sins can be achieved through simple confession to a Catholic priest, or other denominational equivalent when such a doctrine is present.

What is confession, though? What does the Bible say about this subject? Is confession the only necessary step toward salvation? Is there more than one kind of confession discussed in the Bible? In this sermon, I would like to explore these questions from the Bible’s perspective, offering scriptural proof of what God actually intends for confession.

## **Our confession of Christ as the Son of God**

There are three types of confessions outlined in the New Testament. By the authority of the scriptures, the first of these three is our confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Without this profession of faith in the Son, all other acts of righteousness are worthless. There is no way that we can be saved unless we are willing to confess Jesus as Lord. What is so interesting, though, is that we will all confess Christ someday, though it may be all for naught at that point. Our Lord tells us that *“not everybody who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 7:21)*. A day will come when the King will return to this world in a cloud, surrounded by a host of angels, and all the people of the earth will finally know for sure that Christ is Lord! Unfortunately, confession on the day of judgment is confession that is too late. Consider another scripture; *“For it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.’ So then each one of us shall give an account of himself to*

God” (**Romans 14:11-12**). What a sobering thought! On that great and terrible day, every single person who rejected the Gospel, every single skeptic who needed more evidence, every single unbeliever who just did not feel the need for Christ, every single teacher of falsehood, and every single arrogant atheist will bow before God out of terror. We have a choice, therefore, to either confess now or later. As one writer puts it, *“A willing confession now, with other things being equal, produces a blessing in this world and being confessed ultimately by Jesus before God and holy angels in judgment. A compelled confession at judgment will only add up to eternal condemnation”* (**Studies In Romans**, Robert Taylor, Jr., 249).

*“Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God that Father”* (**Philippians 2:9-11**). This passage serves a wonderful companion to our previous scripture. Paul very clearly states every single knee will bow, and every single tongue shall one day confess Jesus. Some to be sure will reach the judgment seat having already confessed. These will get to enjoy the benefits of having Christ confess them before God (**Luke 12:8-9**). All others, however, will be forced to confess because of undeniable circumstances – there are no valid arguments that can be made by an unbeliever or an unrepentant sinner while standing before the Almighty!

What happens to a person who chooses not to confess Christ? Obviously, it means that our Lord will not confess him before God, but what are the ramifications of this state? *“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist...”* (**1 John 4:2-3**). *“Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also”* (**1 John 2:22-23**). Whether the antichrist in this scripture is referring to Satan or to anybody who denies Christ, it does not matter – do we want to be either of them? How foolish it is to not confess our belief in the Lord, for there is no state more damned than being the antichrist – that is, diametrically opposed to the blessed Savior Jesus Christ! Why, then, do people not confess? Consider the motivation of the Jewish rulers in **John 12:42-43**, in which it is stated that they *“loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.”* Though they believed in the Gospel, they were not confessing Christ because of the influence of their contemporaries. Do we ever do that same thing today? At work, at school, at the gym – when there are people saying evil things about Christ, do we have the



courage to confess our belief in Him and take a stand for the Truth? When we are thinking about salvation, do we choose to follow the criticism of friends from school, or unbelieving parents, over obedience to the Lord? What a sad day it will be when our Lord returns to this world and judges all of the people who were almost persuaded to confess Him, but denied the confession because of the pressures of the world, and the temptation to conform (**Romans 12:1-2**).

With this choice in mind, let us make the decision to confess Christ now, while it is still our choice. Turn to **Romans 10:8-10**, *“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ – that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”* The opportunity to be saved is for all of us, for there is no distinction made in this passage between Jew and Gentile, slave or free man, male or female (**Galatians 3:28**). One step on the road to salvation is no further away from us than in our own mouths – amazingly, so few people choose to take advantage of it! How sad it will be on that day when God will condemn so many people simply because they did not believe, repent, confess, and be baptized! Unfortunately, many will take this verse to mean that confession alone saves us (i.e., the “sinner’s prayer”). A closer look at the verse, however, reveals that within the context of the verse belief is also a necessary step to heaven. So what is it? Does confession alone save us? Or does confession *and* faith? The answer is that it is both, for we cannot just look at Bible verses independently from the rest of the Bible! If that is so, then we could easily argue that baptism and belief are the only requirements to salvation (**Mark 16:16**), or baptism and repentance (**Acts 2:38**), or even baptism alone (**1 Peter 3:21**). The fact is that all of these things are necessary because they are interconnected, just as **Romans 10:10** is saying! Our faith not only manifests itself in a desire to repent of our sins, but also to confess to the world that we believe. That confession, however, is meaningless without the action (baptism, repentance) to back it up. Moreover, those actions are worthless without the faith (**James 2**).

As an example of this concept, let us consider the Ethiopian Eunuch in **Acts 8:26-39**. The man obviously had a desire to learn, which is necessary for any of us if we expect to become better Christians day by day. His desire led him to accept the education of the scriptures, which led him to question the status of his soul. This questioning caused within him a desire to make his life right with God, which was manifested in both confession and baptism, one after the other. These acts were not isolated – he was not saved by faith one day, decided to confess a week later, and then make the leap to baptism after reaching spiritual maturity. He

needed all of these steps to be saved, for he did not “*go on his way rejoicing*” until all these things were complete!

### **Our confession of sins**

There is a second type of confession that is discussed in the Bible, which is our confession of sins to one another and to God. Unfortunately, this practice has not been immune to the degrading desires of false teachers, and thus carries with it a number of misconceptions. Most notably, a great number of supposed believers are convinced that one should only confess his or her sins to somebody who is specially ordained for it. The practice of confessional began to be common in 1215 “*after the Council of Lateran, and originated with Innocent III, known as the criminal pope of the inquisition. It is therefore a human invention, the continuance of which depends on the ignorance of its origin*” (***Bulwarks Of The Faith***, Wallace, 174). Essentially, every Catholic church has a small section of the building partitioned off from the main hall. In this box, sinners come to confess their deeds before a priest. There is absolutely no Biblical authority for such a practice! Consider that it was not existent in either the Old or the New Testament – the Jews became angry with Christ when he claimed to have the power to forgive sins (**Mark 2:7**). David wrote in **Psalm 32:5** that he would confess his sins to God alone, and **Isaiah 55:7** tells us that it is God alone who will pardon us abundantly. In the New Testament, there is no command or example for confessional, and an honest look at the scriptures will clearly teach otherwise.

“*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (**1 John 1:9**). Is there any mention of confessing our sins to a priest in this verse? Is it a priest who tells us that our sins are absolved? Of course not, for it is with certainty that we agree with the Jewish leaders when they say that it is God alone who forgives sins! Beyond our confession to God, it is also necessary that we confess our sins to one another – not because our fellow men can forgive us in the same way as God, but because we need their forgiveness when we do wrong to them. “*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed...*” (**James 5:16**). “*It means members to each other as members – and applies to sins against each other, and to the duty of forgiveness, when we ask God to forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. The New Testament teaches two confessions of sin, first to God; second, to anyone wronged*” (Wallace, 178). So what kind of sins need to be confessed publicly? Indeed, it is only those sins that have become public, and involve more people than just ourselves. David prayed to God in **Psalm 51:4**, “*Against Thee, and Thee alone have I sinned and done what is evil...*”

Furthermore, the idea of a man-oriented confessional essentially denies the all-sufficiency of Christ as our Advocate with the Father (**1 John 2:1-2**). According to **Hebrews 4:14-18**, Christians have full and complete access to God through Jesus, and may come boldly without human mediation to the “*throne of grace.*” “*For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (**1 Timothy 2:5**). According to the Bible, I do not need a priest to forgive me of my sins – all I need is a sincere heart, a clear act of repentance, a desire to amend any damage done to others, and the power of the blood of Christ!

### **Christ’s confession of us**

There is a final type of confession discussed in the Bible, and this one is accomplished by Christ alone. “*Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven*” (**Matthew 10:32-33**). It is comforting to know that our Lord will go before the Almighty and speak on our behalf – though we do not deserve such a confession. The warning, however, is that unbelief and disobedience will only lead Christ’s denial of us before the Father. Which path do you choose? “*If you believe in Jesus Christ with all your heart*” (**Acts 8:37**), confess Him before God and man, and be baptized you can be saved (**Mark 16:16**).



# Repentance

There is a growing trend today in the religious world that has to do with what is sometimes the most overlooked step in the plan of salvation. It is unappreciated, not always followed, and is being attacked by unbelievers passionately. What I'm talking about is repentance, a word mentioned about 140 times in the Bible, and whose synonyms are mentioned several hundred more times. A word that is powerful in its true meaning. A word which evokes the truest feelings and passions of the Christian ideal. A word that means to improve oneself, to go beyond the muck that encumbers our souls. A word that flushes out sin.

The point is that some believe that all we have to do is dunk a person under water and everything is fine. Baptism is all we have to do, with no thought about all the sins that we are still committing, or that we will do. But if we look at the Bible, we will find that God expects much more from us when it comes to repentance. He expects not only a change of heart, but a change of action as well! It is one thing to feel sorry about your sins, it is an entirely different thing to do something about it, no matter how hard it may be. So does this mean we *earn* our salvation by repenting of sins? Certainly not! It is a ridiculous assertion, first of all, because one cannot earn a free gift. Grace is unmerited favor, so all the repentance in the world does not give me "spiritual credit" with God. And yet there is a change of attitude and action that is required of us to be saved. *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds"* (**Titus 2:11-14**).

## The Biblical Definition of Repentance

In any study of a word like this, we must first look at what the word actually means, that is, what the original text says about this word. In Greek, the word for repentance is μετανοεω, which literally means to perceive something after it has been done, or to change one's mind. The common usage of the word, however, suggests a change in action. And, every single time that it is used in the New Testament, it is referring to a change of action for the better.

We know that repentance is an essential part of the plan of salvation because we see it exemplified and mentioned right alongside other actions leading to salvation. We see it with baptism in **Acts 2:38**. The Apostle is asked by the crowd, “*What must we do?*” He responds, “*Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.*” We see that repentance leads the soul to forgiveness in **Acts 5:31**. Peter says, “[Christ] *is the One whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*” We see that repentance also leads to knowledge in **2 Timothy 2:25**.

### Excuse By Ignorance

First, there is the thought that repentance is limited only to those who know the Law already. That is, ignorance provides exemption from accountability. Yet the Bible gives us instruction in the matter. Take, for example, the story of King Josiah in **2 Kings 22:8-13, 19, 23:25**. For years, the people of the kingdom were unaware of the Law given to them by Moses at Mt. Horeb. They were in *complete ignorance* of the oracles of God! Yet, as we see in **v. 11**, when Josiah discovered the scrolls and read from the Book of Law that he tore his clothes. Even in his ignorance, Josiah was guilty of sin!

Not only, then, does he repair the sin in his life, but he also travels the country tearing down high places and idols. We read of his good deeds in **2 Kings 23**. Nearly the whole chapter details how he taught the people the Law and returned their hearts to Him, how he reinstated the Passover, how he slaughtered all of the priests of the idols. And, as is stated in **2 Kings 23:25**, “*There was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses. . .*” If ignorance is a valuable excuse for sin, then Josiah and his people had nothing about which to worry. They were ignorant of all the sins they had committed, yet they still repented of them and obeyed the Lord.

Take note of **2 Thessalonians 1:7-8**. We see from this text that the punishment of God comes not only to those who disobey Him, but also “*to those who do not know [Him].*” To an unbeliever, this may sound like a cruel thing. But to the Christian, this should sound like a call to service. This world desperately needs the Gospel and its “*power unto salvation*” (**Romans 1:16**). It also reminds me of the analogy in **Ezekiel 33:1-9**. We read there that if a city is pillaged and burned and its occupants slaughtered because the watchman was lazy, neither the inhabitants of the city nor the watchman will be spared. Just because those

unsuspecting citizens did not know about an imminent attack does not mean they were exempt from the slaughter. Consider a few applications:

- If ignorance is salvation, then Jesus' call in **Matthew 28:18-20** is the worst plan of action ever invented by God. If He wanted the entire world saved, He should have told His disciples to refrain from preaching.
- Not only that, abortion would be the greatest evangelistic effort in the history of mankind if ignorance is salvation.
- God expects us to preach repentance because "*He has overlooked the times of ignorance*" and wants all men to follow Him in conformity to His word (**Acts 17:30**).

### **Accountability To My Form Of Religion Only**

Another common misconception is that only certain people are required to repent of their sins and become accountable to the Almighty Lord. We often listen to the phrase, "Well, I don't believe in a vengeful God" or "My God would never condemn anybody like that." The answer to that is I simply believe in the God found in the Holy Bible. God is the Mighty One, the only God of this existence. He is a God full of wrath. He is "*a consuming fire*" according to **Hebrews 12:29**. It is, indeed, a "*terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (**Hebrews 10:31**). At the same time, and in complete agreement with His vengeful side, God is also loving, powerful, wonderful, merciful, and gentle to those who obey Him and follow His will.

When it all boils down, we have the true God, the One and Only, on our side, and no other manmade god can claim such radiant majesty. Turn to **Isaiah 46:1-9**. Here, in comparison with the gods of man, our Lord is indescribably more wonderful and active! The same can be said of today's manmade religions; Can the mystical religions of the East compare with a Gospel like ours? Can worship of the trees and animals and beasts and all the creation compare with worshipping the Creator Himself?

### **Is Repentance Grief Only?**

A third misconception is possibly the most common of them all. One may say that he has felt guilt for a sin, and that he has mentally devoted himself to God, but that is all that is required of him.

But the Bible sees repentance differently. In fact, Christians are expected to do the hard thing when nobody else will. We are expected to reject sin in our lives to such an extreme degree that we make an impression on our peers. We don't

simply avoid alcohol abuse, we avoid alcohol altogether. We don't simply abstain from sex before marriage, we abstain from pornography and lust. We must do the opposite of what we did in our sinful lives. *"Let him who steals, steal no longer, but rather let him labor, performing with his hands what is good"* (**Ephesians 4:28**).

Christians must have an honest, sincere willingness to do the right thing, no matter the cost! We see an example of this in **Ezra 10:1-5**. The people were in sin and the only way they could repair the situation was to do something very difficult; reject their worldly wives and follow the commands of the Lord.

Christ makes the same point in **Matthew 10:37-38**. If we are not willing to part with even our own families if it were required of us, then we would not be worthy of Him! But we want to have it both ways; we want to be devoted to God without cutting ties with the people, places, and activities that kept us in bondage to sin. If we are unwilling to make practical, real-life changes then our spiritual condition does not change simply because of baptism, and there is absolutely no scriptural precedent for believing such a thing. Does baptism launder stolen money when a thief is converted? Does baptism exempt a person from jail time if he or she has committed murder? Baptism may remove eternal, spiritual condemnation from a person, but it certainly does not remove accountability to the earthly consequences of sin.

### **Zaccheus – Luke 19:1-10**

There are a few things I want to notice from this story. First, be amazed at how quickly Zaccheus obeys the Lord. He meets Christ and in a matter of a day, perhaps only the time of a single meal, he has completely changed his life and become a new man. In **v. 6** the text says the he hurried toward Jesus and received Him gladly. Although the man's life was probably mired in sin, corruption, money, and greed, he manages to do a complete turnaround in a single day.

Second, notice the degree to which Zaccheus obeys the Lord and repairs the sin in his life. We can assume that Zaccheus would have to search endless records to find all of his sins as a tax-collector, but he does not hesitate. And not only does he pay back every single person he has ever defrauded, but he pays back four times that! By the time he has finished, he will have repaid four times what he ever owed any person in his entire life! That is repentance!

### **The Corinthians – 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

A third and final example of repentance is that of the Corinthians, a church of mostly Gentiles. We find out from the text that many of them were fornicators,



and drunkards, and adulterers, and all manner of despicable characters. But baptism and faith in Christ Jesus saved them. It washed them. It cleansed them and made them whole.

There are some valuable lessons that we can learn from the Corinthians. Primarily, we find that Gentiles are most certainly under the specific, outlined Law of Christ, not protected by ignorance or their own moral code. The sins described in the text are very specific sins, some of which would not be considered unlawful to Gentiles (i.e., alcoholism is not an illegal thing for most people, neither is homosexuality, and neither is adultery in our society). But these ignorant, unbelieving, lawless Gentiles were still being judged by the Lord through Jesus Christ. And they were still criminals held accountable to the Gospel. Take a look at **Acts 20:21**.

Another lesson that is valuable is that nobody is stuck in any certain sin, no matter how strong the temptation may be. These Corinthians were homosexuals, yet reformed their behavior. These people were drunkards and alcoholics, yet overcame that as well. These people were living in adulterous and incestuous relationships, yet they rejected worldly “love” to live a better, more righteous life.



# Baptism

The subject of baptism has always been a controversial one, especially with regard to its essentiality in the process of man's salvation. Opponents of the Truth have spent generations seeking to find ways of justifying some kind of justification apart from baptism, most notably by watering down baptism's significance and bolstering faith and grace. But are faith and baptism irreconcilable? Does baptism somehow defeat the purpose of the heart- or belief-driven spirit?

But anybody who claims that baptism means nothing simply has not read the New Testament. It is absolutely undeniable that there is some merit to baptism, although its application is a source of great discord amongst those who claim to follow Christ. *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all"* (**Ephesians 4:4-6**). If one is going to remove the *baptism* from Christianity, what is stopping him from removing the *faith*, or the *body*, or even the *Father*, for that matter. According to the Bible, there is one baptism, not two or three, and it is essential. But what kind of baptism is it?

## The Word Itself

The word that is used in the New Testament for baptism is BAPTISMA (βαπτισμα) for the noun, and BAPTIZA (βαπτιζα) for the verb. According to ***Vine's Dictionary of the Bible***, the noun form (βαπτισμα) means "consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence." The most important aspect of this definition is that it entails *the entire process of entering, staying, and exiting* the place of burial.

The verb form (βαπτιζα) means "to baptize, primarily a frequentative form of the word *to dip*, was used among Greeks to signify dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another." Here, again, notice that the entire process of dipping and removing is described. When one is dyeing a garment, she does not simply sprinkle that garment with the dyeing agent. How ineffective! Rather, a complete burial is necessary. Also, one cannot say a garment has been "dyed" until it has gone through the entire process of being cleaned, prepared, dipped into dye, removed, and dried. Perhaps this is the same with the process of salvation. Visualize these two definitions and you will undoubtedly realize the importance of both liquid and complete burial in both descriptions.

The word baptism is used numerously in the New Testament. It is almost always used to refer to a man or woman who obeys the call of another Christian to partake of the process. In a few cases (**Mark 7:4,8**, **Hebrews 6:2**) it is used to refer to ceremonial washing, and in other places to refer to the burial of a person in his burdens or afflictions (**Luke 2:50**). One fascinating idea of the word baptism is that those items which are baptized in the name of somebody become “closely bound to, or the property of, the one into whose name he was baptized” (***Vine’s Dictionary of the Bible***). The word is also used, almost entirely, with reference to water (**Acts 8:36**, **10:47**, **Hebrews 10:22**).

Of course, one of the most controversial aspects of baptism is its relationship to water. Some try to assert that full immersion baptism in water was only practiced before the ascension of our Lord, that is, during the time of John the baptizer. Clearly, John was baptizing in water (**Mark 1:4**, **Matthew 3:1-6**, **John 3:22**, **3:3-5**). Such a practice was actually common for the Jews, as baptism was a ritual cleansing of the body. Consider the story of Naaman, who was a powerful military advisor to the King of Aram. In **2 King 5:10**, Elisha the prophet prescribed full immersion in the Jordan River as a miraculous cure for leprosy. This argument, therefore, seeks to clearly downplay the role of baptism in the lives of *Christians*. Their proof text is usually **Matthew 3:11**, which says, “I [John the baptist] *baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; for He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*” Some will automatically assume from this passage that water baptism is undeniably removed at the establishment of the church in **Acts 2**. But let us think about it another way. There are three baptisms described in this verse, water, Spirit, and fire. It has already been proven that John was baptizing with water, so at the time of the establishment of the church, that was a common practice. But was this kind of baptism abolished because of the advent of Holy Spirit baptism? Certainly not. And if such is true, then at what point does fire baptism occur? Is water baptism an exclusively pre-Christian practice?

*“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...”* (**Matthew 28:18-20**) Notice the way Jesus describes entrance into discipleship. It is through baptism that we are “*made disciples.*” One cannot be a disciple of Christ – notice it is of Christ and not just a disciple of *John the baptist* – without being baptized in His glorious name. Second, if this baptism is still only referring to John’s baptism of repentance, which would have been abolished on the day of Pentecost, then why is it applied to “*all nations?*” It has been stated in the Bible that John came only to preach to the sons of Israel (**Luke 1:17**, **Malachi 4:6**), and not Gentiles. In the same way, John was not baptizing individuals in the

name of *“the son”* or *“the Holy Spirit.”* Let us also consider a few examples of people *after* Christ’s ascension who were baptized, fully immersed in water.

### Examples of Baptism

The apostle Peter was there when our Lord gave the commission to preach to all the nations, so he understood very well what was inherently involved in *“making disciples.”* Peter preached exactly what he was supposed to have preached, as a Christian and not as a Jew alone, and baptism was always the outcome. Consider **Acts 2:14-38**, in which Peter begins his discourse by saying, *“You men of Judea, and all you that dwell in Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and give ear unto my words...”* It is at this point that he preaches Christ and Him crucified, with the result that those listening are *“pricked to the heart”* and ask Peter and the brethren what needs to be done. In response to this inquiry; *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ”* (**Acts 2:38**). That day, 3,000 souls were added to the church. The question that we must ask ourselves is what we need to do! When we consider our own sins, and the cruel nature of Christ’s death upon a cross, which one of us will not be pricked in the heart? Which one us will not bow his head and feel the deep regret that accompanies the guilt of sin? Contrasted so starkly with the individuals on the day of Pentecost is Felix, the governor who sat and listened to Paul preach the Gospel *“quite often”* but never took the necessary steps to ensure his salvation (**Acts 24:24-27**).

Philip is another preacher of the Word who understood the details of baptism, because on more than one occasion he was instrumental in convincing others to get baptized. **Acts 8:12**; *“But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.”* One point that we can make is that men and women are both welcomed into the church, and baptism is not a strictly masculine action. **Galatians 3:28** states that in Christ *“there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free man, neither male nor female...”* Second, part of preaching the *“good news about the kingdom of God”* included preaching about baptism. Otherwise, why would these people want to respond to his speech by requesting baptism? One *cannot* separate baptism from the kingdom! In later verses, Philip is found preaching to a eunuch from Ethiopia (**Acts 8:26-39**), who questions him about a verse from **Isaiah 53**. Begin with that prophecy, Philip *“preached Jesus to him.”* By preaching Jesus and discussing the prophecy of Isaiah, the preacher convinced the eunuch to get baptized. Inherent in *“preaching Jesus”* is preaching baptism. Once again, they cannot be separated. Notice a few other things about this text: the eunuch was baptized as soon as possible, in the

least likely of all places. He did not wait until he found a more appropriate time and place for baptism; if this act is not necessary, then why the rush? *“They both went down into the water...”* We all must be baptized by *somebody*, and there must be a witness around to attest to the action. We cannot baptize ourselves. Obviously, the baptism was full immersion in the water, because they both needed to get out of the chariot and descend into the pool. If the baptism were simply sprinkling, then why not just baptize the eunuch right there in the chariot? Finally, the eunuch did not *“go on his way rejoicing”* until *after* the baptism had taken place. If this Ethiopian received salvation by faith alone, then why did he not rejoice right there in the chariot before his baptism?

The apostle Paul, when his name was still Saul and he was a persecutor of the church, explains his own conversion in **Acts 22**. In **Acts 9**, Saul meets Christ on the road to Damascus and is blinded. The Lord says, *“Rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do”* (**Acts 9:6**). Notice that whatever it is that will be told to Saul was *not his choice*. It will be something that he *“must do.”* After meeting Ananias and receiving back his sight, Saul is baptized. Later, Paul explains the event thus, *“And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name”* (**Acts 22:16**). It is baptism that washes away our sins. We must also see that baptism is an action that we either decide to take, or decide to reject. We can *“delay”* at it. We must make the choice to *“arise”* to do it – that is, baptism is not just an action that we have done to us (passively), but it is an action that we decisively make.

In **Acts 10**, the Bible reader is introduced to a man named Cornelius, who is noted for his general kindness and righteousness (**Acts 10:1-3**). But for all his righteousness, he was not saved. He had not been baptized, because we read in **Acts 11:14**, in which Peter is recounting the events of his encounter with Cornelius, *“And he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.”* It is not that Cornelius was *already* saved by his faith or his works according to the Law. He was not saved, and only a relationship with Christ, beginning with belief and baptism, could have saved him. After speaking to Cornelius for most of **Acts 10**, Peter finally concludes his discourse by saying, *“Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized...”* And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (**Acts 10:47-48**). Baptism is not just a choice we have, it is the only choice that saves! It is a direct command.

There is no place in the New Testament that teaches that one is saved *without* baptism. In fact, just the opposite is true. Almost every time that belief in the Word or the Gospel occurs, it is followed by obedience (baptism). When Lydia believed in **Acts 16:14**, she was baptized. When the Philippian jailor heard the word spoken by Paul and Silas, he was baptized (**Acts 16:32**). When the

Corinthians *heard* the preaching, *“they believed and were baptized”* (**Acts 18:8**). The Ephesians also *“heard this, and they were baptized”* (**Acts 19:5**).

### **What must I do?**

As was already mentioned in **Acts 2:37-38**, the listeners on the Day of Pentecost heard Peter preaching about Jesus Christ and were pricked to the heart. In response to the message, they asked Peter what they had to do to be saved. His answer was simple: baptism. As a true act of faith and obedience, baptism embodies the self-sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Romans 6:1-11** makes it clear that we should never expect to *“live with Him”* until we have likewise died with Him through baptism. He suffered for us, was hung on a cross for our sins, and was buried to prove the love and mercy of God. We ought to mimic that life, *“For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin”* (**Romans 6:5-6**). If we have not been baptized, then our sins are still weighing heavy on our souls. It is only those who are willing to take up their cross and follow Christ who will know for sure that they have been forgiven. *“Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life”* (**Romans 6:4**). If you want to walk in newness of life, then you can do that now by humbling yourself and following Jesus. *“He who believes and is baptized shall be saved”* (**Mark 16:16**).





# Born Again

## “You Must Be Born Again”

In **John 3:1-6**, Jesus meets a man named Nicodemus. The encounter is brief, but powerful, and a number of lessons can be learned by examining our Lord's words. *“Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”* This statement obviously confuses Nicodemus, to the point that he wonders why Jesus wants him to be physically born again. But consider the explanation offered by the Christ, *“‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit...’”*

The idea that our Lord is conveying is that total spiritual rebirth is required of us to be truly converted. We must completely start over again if we want to make ourselves right with God. Many people, whether consciously or not, have no desire to make a full change when it comes to their lives. They want to change only as much as they need to skirt by. Even worse, the religious world in general is allowing this and even facilitating the poor attitude by allowing churchgoers to “come as you are” without making any real changes. Those who are addicted to worldly vices are given a pass instead of convicted. Church members who are blatantly sinning are not disciplined properly. Some churches seem to practice more of a “don't ask, don't tell” policy than anything else. This is not change, though. This is not rebirth or renewal.

In order for real, meaningful change to occur in our lives, we need to allow ourselves to be totally reborn. There is no desire for half-hearted change in God's eyes, so how willing are you to let go of your old life completely and turn yourself over to God. Consider as a natural example the eruption of Mt. St. Helens. Like many natural disasters such as forest fires and tsunamis, great renewal can only be achieved through total destruction. From the ashes rise a new generation of plants, made stronger by the fire. Without this purging in the carnal world, life would be hard-pressed to maintain any sort of order. So, too, our souls must be completely purged of the “old self”. We must start fresh at our conversion, or else the conversion is effectively meaningless. We must be born again.

## Rebirth Involves A Total Change

Christianity is a religion of conversion. We are expected by God to change ourselves, our nature, our attitudes, our habits, and every action that is contrary to the expectations He has for us.

- *“Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts” (Galatians 5:24).*
- *“But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self” (Colossians 3:8-10).*
- *“How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:2).*
- *“Our old self was crucified with Him” (Romans 6:6).*

This is what makes our faith so unique from others in the world. While many religions require little or no change, and ask nothing from their members, God commands His followers to give everything over to Him, and render both body and soul to His service. Even beyond that, most religions that ask some changes in their members' lives do not require any treatment of habits or lifestyles. “Come as you are” is the prevalent mentality, and that lends itself to people who do not want to make a meaningful or lasting transformation. Contrary to the world's perception of religious conformity, the Bible makes it clear that change must be actively pursued and permanent:

- *“In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self” (Ephesians 4:22).*
- *“Put on the new self” (Ephesians 4:24).*
- *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put aside from you, along with malice” (Ephesians 4:31).*
- *“Let him who steals, steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good...” (Ephesians 4:28).*
- *“If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1).*

## Born Of Water

Jesus is careful to explain to Nicodemus that literal rebirth is not what He means by the requirement that “you must be born again.” It is by the water that

we are born again to a spiritual life. This is further explained in **Romans 6:1-11**. There is a “body of sin” that must be put to death in order for us to achieve the same newness of life that Christ did in His resurrection. The old self is killed, along with its evil practices, and is replaced by the new, living self. *“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”* Practically speaking, our lives must change in baptism by:

- Realizing that baptism is a turning point, but not the final destination. The New Testament gives us constant reminders to keep striving, growing, and pushing ourselves (**Colossians 3:1-4**, **Philippians 3:13-14**, **2 Thessalonians 3:4-5**).
- Embracing the “new creature” concept, seeing myself as a totally different person. Whatever habits I had before are now put to the test of scripture, my vices are judged by a higher calling, and all of my relationships are re-assessed in terms of their influence on me.
- Finally putting to death my sins – no more empty talk and “New Year’s Resolutions”, but actually changing the people, places, and stimuli that brought out the worst in me before.
- Realizing that it is okay to make a big deal out of baptism. Do not shy away from it because many of your religious friends do not understand its role in salvation. Live with a smile on your face because your salvation is definitive. You were “born of water!”

### **Titus 3:3-5**

*“He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which have been done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit...”* (**Titus 3:3-5**). This verse is used often to show that it is not our deeds that save us, but God’s grace working through faith. However, we also are introduced to a very powerful lesson when we consider the meaning of baptism. While it must be admitted without hesitation that our meritorious deeds do not save us (**Ephesians 2:8-9**), we need to realize something about baptism that “faith only” proponents fail to see. Baptism is not a work that we do of ourselves, contrary common misconception. It is not a deed that we perform that deserves merit or recognition. We do nothing in baptism that makes it saving. Notice again how Paul puts it in **Titus 3:3**, *“According to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration...”* It is God who is doing the work in baptism, not us. Baptism itself does not save, but the appeal to God for a clean conscience (**1 Peter 3:21**). It is God washing our sins away with the blood of Christ. It is God showing mercy to us, undeserving though we might be. It is God drawing us near to Him, not us

drawing ourselves. When we are baptized, we give ourselves over to God to do the merciful work of forgiveness. Baptism is most definitely a work, but not a work that we do.

### **The New Creature**

*“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).* Becoming a new creature necessarily involves a complete change, a total reversal. Whereas the old creature lived in its passions and lusts, seeking sin, the new creature wholly lives for Christ (*“And He died for all, that they who lives should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” [2 Corinthians 5:15]*). There are some practical applications that must be considered:

- The new creature does not change half-heartedly, but dives in head first. The new creature also does not change piecemeal, but resolves to mold himself totally in Christ’s image.
- The new creature thinks differently. In order for a mental change to occur, actions must change, attitudes must change, outlook must change.
- The new creature finds the impetus for change in the Word. We must all diligently seek the message of the Bible, and conform ourselves to its life-giving expectations.
- The new creature treats people differently;
- He works harder;
- He devotes himself more to family, responsibilities, mental self control, etc.;
- He is totally under control of his own life. And in situations that the new creature fears will overcome him, he flees (**1 Timothy 6:11**);
- Not only that, but the new creature fills his mind with good things. It is not enough to simply avoid sin, one must actively seek righteousness. *“But flee from these things and pursue...”* Also consider the parable of the man with the demons (**Matthew 12:43-45**), whose soul was left unoccupied after expelling the evil spirit.