



## Concerning Salvation by Grace Through Faith

I agree with Jesus, Who twice said, “. . . Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3,5). He also said, “He who has believed and is baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16). At the conclusion of Matthew’s record of Jesus’ great sermon, Jesus said, “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell – and great was its fall” (Matthew 7:24-27). Furthermore, Jesus said, “Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32,33).

I agree with the apostle Paul, who preached “the word of faith,” specifically, “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in salvation. . . . For whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:8b-10,13). This parallels Paul’s own conversion. God’s messenger in Damascus, Ananias, instructed Saul, saying, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16).

I agree with the apostle Paul that we “have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8,9). And that “in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Col. 2:11,12).

I agree with the apostle Peter, whose direct response to the direct inquiry of the Jews who crucified Jesus about what they must do to be saved,

was, “‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ . . . So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:38,41).

I agree with the apostle Peter, who said, “Corresponding to [the salvation of Noah’s family through the water], baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).

The teaching of the Lord and His apostles concerning our justification is clear. Faith is the means by which we are saved; faith in the blood of Jesus as our propitiation (Romans 3:25). Faith is expressed by our repentance, confession, baptism and continuing life of devotion. Inasmuch as Jesus and His apostles include each of these as expressions of faith in the blood of Jesus, so must we.

It is ironic that the only one among these expressions of faith that is ever called into question is the one that is presented in the passive voice. No one ever discounts as unnecessary those that are presented in the active voice.

Paul says faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). Hearing the gospel is clearly an active physical exercise everyone agrees is required to be saved. It is something man must do. For “how will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14) In this passage (verses 13-15) there are various human actions involved in people being saved by faith. There is hearing, calling, preaching, sending and going.

Repenting is displayed by human action. John, the one who came baptizing, chastised the Pharisees and Sadducees, demanding that they “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8). Bearing fruit is an active human response; something man must do. Peter states that repentance involves a “returning” (Acts 3:19). Jesus sent out the twelve, who “preached that men should repent” (Mark 6:12). Jesus instructed His disciples, saying, “If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). How were the disciples to determine their brother’s repentance, except by some tangible means

– something the brother did (bearing fruit of repentance)? This is sufficient to demonstrate that repentance is something man must do in order to be saved.

Confession – confession of faith in Jesus – is expressed “with your mouth” (Romans 10:9). We must declare that Jesus is Lord and “that God raised Him from the dead” (Romans 10:9). The confession that results in salvation is a verbal affirmation (Romans 10:10). This confession is also verbalized by calling on the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13), which God, through Ananias, told Saul to do in his baptism. Confession, then, is an essential active response of the sinner who seeks salvation. It is something the sinner must do in order to receive the gift of salvation.

Baptism, the re-enactment of the gospel – the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus – is the only one among these gospel commands that is presented in the passive voice. That is, baptism is always portrayed as something to which the sinner submits himself, an action that is performed upon him by another. “Repent (active voice) and be baptized (passive voice),” said Peter. “Get up and be baptized (passive voice),” said Ananias. “He that believes and is baptized (passive voice) shall be saved,” said Jesus. Paul presents baptism as an expression of faith in the working of God (Colossians 2:12). Among all these gospel commands, baptism is unarguably the simplest, easiest and most accessible, requiring the least amount of effort (aka work). It is the sinner’s confession of faith in the promise of God, Who then and there promises to wash away/blot out/forgive sin

and to give His gift of presence and power in the Holy Spirit, Who regenerates and sanctifies (1 Peter 1:2). The one believing Jesus’ promise will readily present himself for “the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7).

Understand that none of these gospel commands belongs in the category of “works salvation,” despite the fact that all but one is presented as a human work. All of these comprise the biblical teaching that we are saved by grace through faith. It isn’t the action of hearing and believing the message that saves. It isn’t the changed behavior of repentance that saves. Neither is it the utterance of the words, “Jesus is Lord,” that saves. It is the faith that all of these express, the faith that is displayed thereby. In the same way, it isn’t the action of baptism that saves, any more than there is any power in the water. It is the faith that leads one to the water where he calls upon the Lord to fulfill His gracious promise to save (redeem, justify, regenerate, sanctify). It is the faith displayed by obedience (Romans 1:5; 16:26) that saves.

I have neither the desire nor the authority to give more or less weight to any aspect of God’s offer of pardon. Sinners are in no position to negotiate the terms. We are bankrupt paupers seeking favor from the King of kings and Lord of lords. I am happy and eager to meet Him on whatever terms He sets. Salvation is His to give and mine to receive. Why would a beggar like me resist compliance or argue necessity?