

# Straight Bible Talk

Manchester Church of Christ, Share Christ's Love and Share His Message

## God's Basic Plan of Salvation

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I have a degree in Mechanical Engineering which means I have studied in the fields of mathematics, physics and chemistry. I also had a course in nuclear engineering including working out the basic design for a nuclear device to generate power. I have studied a lot of complicated things.

When I read the Bible, I am amazed at how simply it sets forth God's plan for people. It does not require a degree in rocket science to see what God expects from each one of us. A child may read and understand what God wants.

Theologians want to complicate the matter. Catechisms are written which often distort the basic plan of salvation or entirely ignore it and emphasize things that are irrelevant in coming into the family of God. Books are written, many in theological jargon that only one conversant in their language can understand. The Bible was written by common men for common people. It was written so that we might know the true God and that we might be reconciled to Him.

First of all, it is important to note that God's plan for our salvation is divided into two parts. There is what God has done and is doing that we might be saved. And there is that which we must do to be saved.

For those who contend that there is nothing that we need to do, I would simply reply that, if such be true, there is no need for the Bible. There is no need for any word from God, for all has already been decided and the matter is forever settled.

The Bible exists simply because there are things that God expects us to learn and there are things that He expects us to do. The Bible is based on the concept of man's free will. In

the Bible, God presents us with choices. We may choose to serve Him or we may choose to ignore or disobey Him. We have a choice. Every command in the Bible screams, "**You have a choice.**" We will talk about the choices that must be made for salvation later.

### God's Part in our Salvation

Let me begin by saying that God's role in our salvation must be acknowledged. Without God's calling and seeking us, we could not have fellowship with Him.

In the creation, God has revealed Himself to us as the Creator. In His word (the Bible) He reveals His nature and His will for us. If there is no God, there is no salvation. Death is the end.

In order that we might be saved, God sent His only begotten son, Jesus Christ, into the world to die on a hill outside Jerusalem. The death of Jesus was a peace offering for the sins of every person. Jesus died for all that all might be saved. **God is no respecter of persons, but offers salvation on the same terms to every single human being.**

Throughout the Old Testament one may read the prophecies of the coming of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. Those prophecies were in order to prepare Israel to receive their Savior, Jesus. Many did. The apostles were all men of Israel who understood that the prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus. Thousands of others from Israel, men and women, became followers of Jesus because they understood that he was the one predicted in their holy writings, the Old Testament.

It is the blood of Jesus, poured out on the cross, that provides the basis for God's forgiveness of our sins. Apart from the blood

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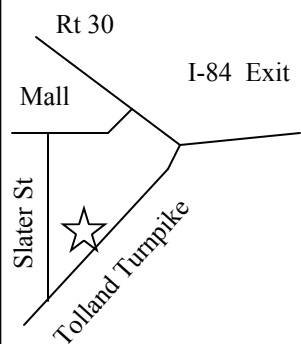
Sun Bible Classes—9 AM  
Sun Worship—10 AM

Sun Eve Worship—6:00 PM  
Wed Bible Class—7:00 PM

“For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Hebrews 10:30-31

All scripture quotations are from the  
New American Standard Bible unless  
otherwise indicated.



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of Jesus there is no forgiveness. In the Lord's Supper (or communion) Jesus said, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." While the idea of a blood sacrifice for sins is repugnant to many, that is God's plan.

The resurrection of Jesus is God's proof that Jesus is His son. The proofs of the resurrection are found in all four gospels as well as in other books of the New Testament. God presents evidence that requires that we make a decision. John closed his gospel, near the end, with these words: "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of god; and that believing you may have life in His name."

Providing the information necessary for us to be saved in the Bible is God's part in our salvation. Making sure the Bible is preserved and available to people is God's work. Surely a God who can create a universe can preserve a book for people to know Him and the way to peace with Him.

God has sent forth His people to proclaim the message of salvation to every person. Faithful Christians have been engaged in such preaching since Jesus went back to heaven to sit on his throne as Lord of lords and King of kings. In this way God continues His work of saving people.

Clearly God demands a response to what He has done. That response is man's part in his own salvation.

## **Man's Part in Salvation**

Let me be clear. The Bible itself is evidence that God expects a response. Salvation is a matter of a person deciding to accept God's offer. It is not a matter of working for God's favor. It is not a matter of deserving to be saved. But the offer God extends must be accepted in order for a person to be in fellowship with God. God does not make it happen until a person accepts His offer, on His terms.

There are several stories in the Bible that make it clear that we must make a choice in order to be saved. In each story, the person seeking salvation is told to do something. They are never told, "There is nothing to do. It is solely up to God."

The first story concerns a rich man who came to Jesus with a question. "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"

Jesus answered, "Why are you asking me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." Note that Jesus tells him there is something he needs to do.

After further discussion, the man responded concerning the commandments he needed to keep, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"

Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Again, note that Jesus tells him that there is something that he needs to do.

Twice Jesus had the opportunity to tell the man that there was nothing for him to do, that salvation was all God's doing. Twice

Jesus responded with something that the man needed to do to have eternal life. That ought to settle the issue, but there is more.

When the church began on the day of Pentecost, it began with Peter preaching the gospel to Jews in the city of Jerusalem. Among those whom Peter addressed were people guilty of demanding the death of Jesus. Peter told them, "God has made him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

Pierced to the heart they cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter responded, "Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The first thing you may have noticed is that the answers given by Jesus and Peter are different. Peter says nothing about keeping the commandments and Jesus says nothing about repentance or baptism. Does this mean that one may pick the answer that they like and reject the other? Hardly! It means that one simply needs to look a little deeper into the circumstances surrounding the question and answer given.

Jesus was talking with one who lived under the covenant made through Moses at Mt. Sinai. Peter was talking with one who came under the new covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus. The answers correspond to the covenant that was legally binding at the time. Abraham was told to leave his country and Noah was told to build an ark. Neither of those activities are binding upon anyone today because we live under a new covenant, instituted by Jesus, our mediator with God. The thief on the cross is not a model for our salvation since he salvation lies before the death of Jesus. He died under the covenant made by Moses not under the new covenant sealed by the blood of Jesus' death on the cross.

Second, we might notice that in neither case was anything said about faith or believing. Neither the rich man nor the people on the day of Pentecost were told that they needed to have faith to please God. The writer of Hebrews tells us, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." If faith is required for salvation, then why is it not mentioned in either of the stories that we have examined?

Again, if we look carefully at the context in each of the stories it will become obvious why nothing is said about faith. The rich man had spent his life obeying the commandments that God had given through Moses. He came to Jesus seeking eternal life. Both of those are indications of faith in God who gave the commandments and faith that God had sent Jesus as a prophet to His people.

The people to whom Peter spoke had traveled to Jerusalem to observe the Old Testament Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost in the New Testament). Their faith in God had led them to make the trip in obedience to the command given through Moses. Not only did they indicate their faith by their trip to Jerusalem, but they indicated their faith in Peter's teaching about Jesus by asking the question, "What must we do?"

## Faith, Repentance, Baptism

I have before me a little tract put out by a local church. It contains information that I have often seen and heard in other sources so this is not just a product of one church. It begins with a statement containing a command. By this I understand that they accept that salvation includes something that man must do. Here is what they have written.

“Would you like to have eternal life and go to heaven. If you want to trust Jesus Christ as your Saviour, pray (here is the command, SGB) this prayer asking Him to save you:

“Dear Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner and deserve the punishment of hell, but I believe You died for my sins and paid my penalty for me. Right now I trust you as my Saviour and ask you to come into my life. Thank you for saving me. Amen.”

Perhaps you have seen something like this yourself. Perhaps you have followed instructions and prayed a prayer something like this and believe you are saved by having done this. It is interesting, in the prayer above, that the person was told to pray “asking Him to save you,” and in the prayer itself, instead of asking, the person declares himself saved. That seems pretty audacious to me. Perhaps there was a “voice” during the prayer announcing that the person was saved and we just did not hear it!

Notice also that there is nothing that would indicate the person believed in God or in the resurrection from the dead. Can one be saved without believing those things? In reply, one might say, “It is understood that the person believes in God and the resurrection?”

I agree that such is possible, and even more likely, that such is probable. Often, in reading about people being saved in the Bible there are certain things that are simply understood without being stated. They are understood precisely because somewhere else in the Bible they are clearly stated. Not every story about people being saved tells us everything that is necessary for salvation. But by examining all the stories we can be sure that we include everything that is necessary for salvation. It is not a matter of picking the story we like and ignoring the rest of what God said.

The Old Testament describes the God that we are to believe in. The Gospels describe the Son of God, Jesus, that we are to believe in. What follows from Acts through Revelation is a description of how we become disciples of Jesus and how we live as disciples in this world.

What we need to do is examine the Bible carefully to determine what people had to do to be saved under the new covenant. We will not find this information in the Old Testament. We will find it in the information given after the resurrection of Jesus. The book of Acts is filled with stories of people being saved. It is not difficult to read these stories and determine what God expects a person to do in order to receive His forgiveness.

What is required before everything else is an open mind to accept whatever God has said. This is a change of mind from “I know I am right,” to “Maybe I am wrong about some things and I need to change.” Both Jesus and John the Baptist urged a repentance that leads to faith and a repentance that leads to a righteous life.

There were three things that Noah had to do in order to be saved. He had to believe in God, build the ark and take food on the ark for himself and the animals.

There were three things that Abraham had to do before God declared him righteous. He had to believe in God, leave his family and relatives and go to the land that God had selected for him as a place to live.

There are three things that every person today must do in order to have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. That person must believe in God, repent of their sins and be baptized. This was generally accepted in the church for 1500 hundred years, although the order of these three things and the proper administration of baptism became matters of dispute. It was not until the time of John Calvin that it was decided that none of these were necessary. Today, many accept the first two and deny the third.

It is not the Bible that has changed. The Bible is clear on the necessity of faith, repentance and baptism. It is also clear on the order in which these must occur. And it is clear on what baptism is, an immersion in water.

All of this may be clearly seen by reading the book of Acts. It may also be seen in references in the letters written to Christians, although in those letters the reference is always to what has already been done. We will look at the stories in Acts to establish the necessity of faith, repentance and baptism for salvation.

In Philippi, Paul and Silas were thrown in prison. About midnight there was an earthquake that threw open the doors to the prison. In despair the jailer was about to take his own life when Paul called out, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here! After bringing Paul and Silas out side, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Note that he asked what he must do. He was told to “believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

The story does not end there. The jailer took Paul and Silas to his home where everyone was awakened to hear the word of the Lord. In response to Paul’s preaching, the jailer washed the wounds of Paul and Silas. This is an indication that he repented of his earlier mistreatment of the prisoners. The story continues, “and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.”

In this story we have no clear indication of when the jailer and his family were saved. We do know that they were required to believe and that there was repentance and baptism after hearing the word of God.

When Paul preached to the philosophers in Athens, he pointed out, from their idols, that there was a God about whom they were ignorant. Paul told them about that God. He then informed them about what God required: “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people every where should repent because He has fixed a day in which He will judge

the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

The story concludes by telling us that some believed what Paul had preached and that they “joined him.” There is no mention of their baptism, so we cannot draw any conclusion from this story about the relevance of baptism to salvation. We can conclude that repentance is necessary because Paul stated that in his speech to them.

On the road to Damascus, Saul (later to be named “Paul”) saw Jesus and asked, “What shall I do, Lord?” Jesus replied, “Get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”

In Damascus, Saul went three days without eating and spent his time in prayer. The third day, the Lord sent Ananias to him. Ananias told Saul, after healing his sight (he had been blinded by the light that he saw on the road), “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”

Some have claimed that Saul was saved on the road to Damascus when he saw Jesus and called him Lord. If so, he was saved in his sins for his sins were not washed away until three days later when he was baptized. Calling on the Lord is also associated with his baptism.

On the day of Pentecost, about 3000 people were baptized “for the forgiveness of their sins.” These were all Jew-

ish people.

Later, the gospel was preached in Samaria and “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.”

When the gospel was preached to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, by Peter, he “ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”

It did not matter whether it was a Jew, a Samaritan or a Gentile, all were baptized. You need to be baptized.

But what about babies, does it not seem reasonable that they should share in the faith of their parents? When Philip met a man from Ethiopia, he taught him about Jesus. As they were riding along the road in the Ethiopian’s chariot, they came to some water. The Ethiopian asked Philip, “What prevents me from being baptized?” The answer was, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

This is consistent with the commission that Jesus gave to his disciples after his resurrection, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved.” (The verse continues by describing what happens if one rejects the gospel.)

Baptism is a response of faith. Baptism of a baby is no response from the child. The child is without sin and so without need of a baptism to “wash away” their

sins.

Following Jesus requires that **you** obey him. Someone cannot make the decision for you, not your parents, not your friends, not your church.

What about sprinkling or pouring for baptism? Are these not equally acceptable?

Jesus was baptized **IN** the Jordan River. He was not baptized with water from the Jordan. He was not baptized beside the Jordan. He went into the water and after his baptism he **came up out of the water**.

In Bible baptism the person is put in the water. In sprinkling and pouring, water is put on the person. The same verb cannot be used to describe different actions. The Ethiopian, whom Philip baptized, went down into the water and came up out of the water. The Bible is consistent in describing baptism as an immersion in water.

Churches have changed baptism from immersion to sprinkling and pouring. God has not changed his mind. The Bible is God’s standard for salvation, not the church.

God’s plan for your salvation is simple. He sent Jesus to die for you and raised him from the dead so that you might believe that He is God and that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. God’s plan is that you might turn away from you sins in repentance and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. It is that simple.

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