

What Do You Want Me To Do, Lord?

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Introduction

Welcome to this study of God's Word. We hope you will find this booklet helpful and encouraging in your search for truth. This booklet is designed to stand alone or accompany the audio program on compact disc (CD) **Lord, what do you want me to do?** If you do not have the audio program, then please log on to www.livingletters.org today to order a copy.

The inspiration for this study comes from the question asked of Jesus by Saul of Tarsus: "Lord, what do you want me to do" (Acts 9:6)? Once Saul recognized that he was not right with God, he immediately asked the important question: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" Jesus affirmed the validity of Saul's question. In turn, the Lord responds, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you *must* do" (Acts 9:7—italics mine). While many concern themselves with career, family or material consumption, the spiritual man within each of us will only be satisfied or fulfilled in a right relationship with God. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

We encourage you to journey with us through the pages of God's Word as we seek the answers to this important question. We consider four basic teachings of the Bible that are necessary to the process of conversion and continuing faithfulness to Christ. First, we consider what the Bible says about faith. This is the cornerstone of conversion and discipleship. "Without faith," the Bible says, "it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). Second, we consider what the Bible says about repentance. In an age of self-help, the Biblical teaching of repentance is both relevant and refreshing. Third, we

consider what the Bible says about confession. Christianity is a confessional religion. What we believe must be confessed (See Matthew 10:32). Fourth and finally, we consider what the Bible says about baptism. This is the pivotal moment, in which God regenerates and forgives sins, applying the precious blood of Jesus. Baptism is the significant marker of faith in our lives, the *effectual* as well as symbolic act of faith that justifies and sanctifies the believer.

While this booklet is intended to ignite your interest and introduce you to the basic teachings of the gospel, we hope that you will continue to study God's Word and build your faith accordingly. Jesus says in His sermon on the mount:

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall (Matthew 7:24-27).

The Apostle Paul declares, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Our aim is to present only what we may discover in God's Word—the Bible. We pray that in doing so, we will be found pleasing in the Lord, and that you may also find that "faith once delivered" (Jude 3) and establish yourself in it. If you have questions, please contact us at www.livingletters.org

Grace and peace,

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Faith

Following the strict orders described in Acts 16:23 the jailer in Philippi threw Paul and Silas into a damp, dark, interior cell of the prison. With his own life at risk should the prisoners' escape the jailer secured their feet in stocks and locked them into the terrible pit. Such an awful fate could discourage the most dedicated disciple! Incredibly though, nothing could dampen the Spirit of these two zealous Christians.

About midnight, unfamiliar sounds rang out from the depths of the dungeon. The other prisoners could hardly believe their ears. Paul and Silas were singing and praying! Beatings and imprisonment was no match for their faith. Suddenly the earth trembled and the foundation of the prison began to shake so violently that all the cell doors opened and the stocks of the prisoners loosed. All that remained was for the men to walk free.

In the meantime, the sleeping jailer bolted from his bed at the shaking of the unexpected earthquake. Wiping the sleep from his eyes, he saw the prison doors open. He imagined his worst fears were a reality and that the prisoners had surely escaped. Immediately he reached for his sword and raised it to take his own life but before he could thrust into his quivering body he heard a voice say "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here" (v. 28). Quickly he called for a light and ran to the cell of Paul and Silas. Astonished and trembling he fell down before them and asked "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (v. 30)

This story as recorded in Acts 16:23-31 proposes the most important question any man or woman may ask. "What must I do to be saved?" Moreover, if the question is so important, you know the answer is at least equally important. In Acts 16:31 Paul and Silas tell the jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...."

What Is Faith?

In the New Testament, the word 'faith' and 'believe' describe the same element in salvation. ('Faith,' a noun, describes what we have and 'believe,' a verb, describes what we do.) For example, the centurion in Matthew 8:8-13 displayed such confidence in Jesus' ability to heal his servant that Jesus told his followers, "...I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel...." (Vs. 10) Jesus also told the centurion in Matthew 8:13 "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour." The word 'faith' in verse 10 describes the same quality as the word 'believed' in verse 13.

Still if you truly want salvation, it remains for you to understand the meaning of Bible faith. Where does it come from? What purpose or part does it play in the Lord's plan of salvation? It is important to know that 'faith' is not an indescribable gift that you receive from God when you least expect it. It is not a gift that you get after days or months or even years of pleading to God.

Our scientific era emphasizes the need for facts. Show me God and I will believe. Show me the crucified Christ and I will believe. Show me Heaven and I will believe. Consequently, many men and women disavow any need for 'faith' in their life. Yet, some of the most important things in this life depend solely upon 'faith.' Do you believe there was a civil war in this nation? Why do you 'believe' it? You 'believe' it because of the credible testimony of men who lived to see it. How many marriages could exist if the husband and wife did not have 'faith' in one another? Every time you write a check, someone is showing 'faith' in you. If you stop and think about it, it would be very difficult for our world to function at all if it were not for 'faith!' 'Faith' is a vital element of every aspect of our lives, including the part of our lives that touch God. Scripture tells us in Hebrews 11:6, "...without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is...." You may be a moral person. You may be a model citizen. You may be a giving person. However, as good as you may be, you cannot please God without 'faith.'

What then, is this precious saving 'faith?' In Hebrews 11:1 the Bible tells us that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The word 'substance' and 'evidence' could have been translated 'foundation' and 'proof' respectively thereby telling us that 'faith' is the 'foundation' of our hope and the 'proof' of things we cannot see. As an example, think of your hometown. You know it exists because you have seen it. On the other hand, we have never seen Heaven but we have confidence it exists because we believe the Bible testimony regarding it. In that respect, our 'faith' is the foundation of our hope and proves what we cannot see.

In the New Testament, we have a record of Jesus' life. It is brief and describes only small fragments of his work. Nevertheless, when we hear these descriptions we accept or reject what we hear as true or false. If we accept them as true, we have the beginnings of faith. Jesus said in John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." He is the foundation of everything we must believe. He is the foundation of the church. Take him out of the church and there is no church. He is the foundation of the gospel. Take him out of the gospel and it contains no truth. He is the foundation of our hope. Remove him from hope and all hope is lost. Jesus is 'all in all' and any faith that will redeem the soul of man rests upon Him. These facts empower the words of Jesus in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Jesus Christ is the gift of God but only to those who hold faith in Him!

The Source of Faith

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans about 'faith.' In Romans 10:14 he said, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" In case you do not recognize it, there is an order described by Paul. You cannot call on the Lord if you do not 'believe.' You cannot 'believe' in the Lord if you have not 'heard' (his word). You cannot 'hear' (his word) without a 'preacher.' Based on Paul's information we may conclude that 'preaching' is necessary for men to 'hear' the word and 'hearing' is necessary for men to 'believe.' Paul summarizes this in verse 17 when he wrote, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

There are many strange ideas about the source of 'faith.' Some men believe that 'faith' is a gift of God that appears like the flash of a camera. Someday it will come, but how and when they do not know. Others think 'faith' will come through some mysterious experience; all their life they anticipate a day when

they will see the light, know the truth of the Lord and consequently 'get religion.' Unfortunately, these ideas are unscriptural and produce more unbelief than belief. I wonder how many people have missed the Kingdom of God because a preacher failed to teach the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament makes it clear how faith affects the heart of the unsaved. Peter told the converted Pharisees in Acts 15:7 that it was God who decided that the Gentiles would 'hear' the preaching of the Gospel through his mouth that they might believe. A bolt of lightening did not flash from the heavens striking faith into the heart of the Gentiles. No, their faith in Christ came through the preaching of Peter. The Apostle Paul said the same thing concerning the Corinthians in Acts 18:8. Paul said, "...many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." Moreover, Jesus in his prayer of John 17 said in verse 20, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." The truth regarding Jesus Christ is in his word. If you want to 'believe' in Christ, you are going to have to turn to his word. You maybe influenced along the way by godly parents, a good friend or even the actions of a total stranger, but this one thing is certain, "faith comes by hearing the word of God." However, beware. If you do not hear the truth, you may find yourself believing a lie. Make sure what you 'hear' is from the word of God.

I doubt that the world has ever needed authentic preaching, as it needs it today. Too many 'preachers' are concerned with theological and philosophical discussions rather than the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are reasons why the Bible uses descriptions like that of Paul in Romans 1:16 where he describes the gospel as the "power of God unto Salvation." The Greek word for power gives us our English word 'dynamite.' Modern engineers use dynamite to change the layout of the land. They can literally level mountains. The Gospel has an even greater power to change! It can change the life of the most wretched sinner and give new hope and meaning to their life.

The writer of the Hebrew letter uses a moving description to portray the power of God's word. In Heb. 4:12 the Bible tells us that "...the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [is] a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." We live in a day and time of great power, such great power in fact that we could destroy our own planet. Yet, look at this world and find a power that compares to the influence of Jesus Christ. Since his advent, nearly 2,000 years ago, the entire structure of civilization has changed. Nothing has offered an alternative to greed, hatred, war and hell like the word of God. It has the power to change lives and save

souls. James paid tribute to God's word when he wrote (Jas. 1:21), "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."

What can take a heart soiled by life's impurities, change it and give it new life? The answer is God's word. James tells his readers to put aside immorality and the evil that is so common among men and transplant it with the word of God. Why is that? Because only the word of God produces faith that can save the soul, make this life better and give hope for eternal life!

In John 20:30-31 the Bible says, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." As John is wrapping up his account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, he informs his readers that his book is not a detailed account of Jesus' life. Nevertheless, he says, these things "are written that you might believe." Believe what? That Jesus rose from the dead. That Jesus is a good man who did good things for other men. No, there is something far more important according to John.

The Gospel of John covers a period of about 33 years. During this time, a man from Nazareth known as Jesus crossed the stage of life. He provides all the information a man or woman needs to believe that Jesus performed great miracles and showed great compassion. John shows that Jesus is the one who fulfilled the prophecies regarding the Messiah and is the realization of God's promise to man. But most of all he tells us "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." "Believe this," John says, "and you can have eternal life...."

~ David Smith

Repentance

Repentance is a common theme throughout the Bible. The significance of repentance is apparent to even the most casual reader of Scripture. Moreover, repentance is a necessary part of the Christian religion. The sinner cannot find peace with God without first repenting of his or her sins.

The Bible records an event in the life of Christ when the subject of repentance rises to the surface. Not unlike many people today, many of those who lived at the time of Christ misunderstood the nature of sin and its consequences. They believed that if a man committed a worse sin than some other man, then he would receive a more severe consequence. Like Job and his friends, the Jews contemporary with Jesus believed that the consequences for sin came immediately, and in an earthly way. Jesus countered this false notion about sin. Luke's gospel gives us the record.

There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:1-5)

All sinners must repent. Repent or perish is the clear message of the Lord. In context, Jesus is predicting how the unrepentant sinners of Jerusalem would physically perish at its destruction in the year A.D. 70. In principle, however, the teaching of Jesus appropriately describes the eternal fate of all who do not repent.

Again, Jesus says, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Mark 2:17). Sinners are sick. It is sin-sickness. The great physician came to heal the sickness of sin with the prescription of repentance.

Repentance is also a part of the great commission of Jesus Christ. As Jesus sent his apostles out into the world to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15) and make disciples of all nations, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), he also declared that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem,” according to Luke 24:47. Furthermore, we see that the apostles did preach about repentance. In the city of Athens, the apostle Paul stands before a crowd representing many nations. He concludes his sermon with the following words:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)

Undoubtedly, repentance is a key part of the Christian system. Repentance is a command of Scripture! Therefore, we must obey in faith. The Greek word most commonly translated repentance in the New Testament is the word *metanoia*. It means, “a change of mode of thought and feeling, repentance.”¹ Repentance begins on the inside of a person and has results seen on the outside. It’s a change of mind that produces a change of life. John the Baptist charged the unrepentant of his day, “Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Matthew 3:8).

¹ Perschbacher, Wesley, J. (1990). *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., p. 273.

With this basic definition of repentance fixed in our minds we may properly consider the Bible's more detailed teaching about repentance.

I. What repentance is NOT

Sometimes, the best way to understand a Bible subject is to first determine what something is NOT. By this method we may narrow our focus and so determine more easily and precisely the true meaning of repentance or any other Bible subject. As a sculptor must chip away the excess material to fin his subject, so the careful Bible student comes to understand the beautiful truths of God's word.

A. Repentance is NOT Fear

First, we understand that repentance is not fear. The Bible tells us that Felix, the provincial governor, had fear but not repentance. In Acts 24:24-25, Luke records:

And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

Not unlike Felix, we may be afraid and fear the consequences of our sins. We may have heard of the eternal punishment awaiting those who do not know God and "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:8). We may find it hard to sleep at night, knowing our lost condition before God. But such fear does not constitute repentance.

B. Repentance is NOT regret or remorse

Second, we understand that repentance is not regret or remorse. After betraying Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, Judas became sorry for his actions. Matthew gives us the account:

When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood." And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter's field, as the LORD directed me." (Matthew 27:1-10)

Clearly, Judas felt genuine regret and remorse for his actions. Perhaps, he did not realize that Jesus would be condemned to die. For whatever reasons, once Judas heard that Jesus had been condemned he regretted his actions. Nevertheless, such regret or remorse is not repentance.

Just because someone may feel sorry about something they have done, it does not mean they have repented. A criminal who gets caught and thrown into jail may be truly sorry about his circumstances. He may wish that he never had committed the crime. But this is not repentance. Sorrow may or may not lead to repentance. The apostle Paul says, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death (2 Corinthians 7:10). Judas had the sorrow of the world. Thus, he went and hanged himself. Godly sorrow is different. It is the kind of sorrow that regrets having sinned against God. It is the kind of sorrow that leads someone to do whatever it takes to get right with God. Godly sorrow leads to repentance.

C. Repentance is NOT conviction of sin

Third, we understand that repentance is not merely the conviction of sin. As the apostle Peter preached the first gospel sermon of the gospel age, he charged the Jews with the murder of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. Luke records what Peter preaches and the crowd's response:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” (Acts 2:36-38)

Clearly, Peter's audience was convicted of sin—the sin of murdering the Messiah. Luke says, “They were cut to the heart.” They understood that what they had done was wrong. And yet, Peter instructs them to repent! Therefore, repentance is not merely the conviction of sin. Once a person realizes that he is a sinner, then he must do something about it. Just acknowledging the fact of sin in my life does not constitute repentance.

D. Repentance is NOT reformation or restitution

Fourth, we understand that repentance is not merely restitution or reformation of life. Suppose that you steal some money from a bank. If you give the money back, then you have made restitution. But, have you repented? If you decide to never steal again, then you have reformed your life. But, have you repented? Many people believe that reforming their lives is tantamount to repentance. The fact is that repentance involves reformation of life, but it is more than reformation or restitution. Consider what the apostle says of the Thessalonians:

Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Consider the action of the Jailer at Philippi recorded for us in The Book of Acts. He did not believe “only” as is often suggested. The Bible says that he took Paul and Silas, his former prisoners, and “washed their stripes, and immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33). The Thessalonians and the Philippian Jailer made restitution and reformation, but they also “turned to God” to serve and obey.

All these factors—fear, regret, remorse, conviction of sin, restitution and reformation of life—may lead a person to repentance. But repentance involves more than these things. Having cleared away what repentance is not, we now should consider what repentance truly means.

II. What repentance IS

Repentance is what motivates people to turn toward God like the Thessalonians and the Philippian Jailer.

turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. (Jonah 3:4-10)

The prophet's message was short and to the point: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" It is not unlike the message of Jesus on the subject: Repent or perish (Luke 13:3, 5). The people respond by fasting and "turning from their evil way" (Jonah 3:10). This concept of "turning" is the heart of repentance. Yes, restitution and reformation of life are involved, but it also involves turning in the opposite direction and moving toward God to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

This new direction in a person's life should be visible, tangible and apparent. As we noted above, when people came to be baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, he demanded repentance. Matthew records:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." (Matthew 3:7-8).

Genuine repentance, Biblical repentance, must result in fruit toward God (See John 15:5-6; Galatians 5:22). As the seed of God's word (Luke 8:11) is planted into the heart, it must then bring forth fruit (Luke 8:15). If there is no fruit, then it is clear that the heart has not truly repented.

The apostle Peter uses an interesting analogy to explain genuine repentance. Speaking of those who lack repentance, he says, "But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire' " (2 Peter 2:22). This behavior is in the nature of animals. You may take a sow and wash her clean, but as soon as you release her into the field she will begin wallowing in the mud. Why is this? The reason is obvious: no matter how clean she may be on the outside, she is still a pig on the inside.

Summary

Repentance means turning to God in obedience of faith. Hearing God's word, we may believe (Romans 10:17). Believing, we then must repent (Acts 2:38). This means that we turn away from sin and turn toward God through Jesus Christ, who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Friend, you may fear for your soul. You may regret the sinning in your life. You may be convicted of your sin and you may have begun to reform your life. Do not fall short. Turn to Jesus before it is everlastingly too late. Repent!

~ Ryan Connor

Confession

No life compares with that of Jesus Christ. The triumphs of his life as seen in his preaching and healing as well as in his death, burial and resurrection have made an impact upon all people regardless of who they are and where they live. His influence is so far reaching that even those of other faiths acknowledge his superiority over the average man. The Islam religion recognizes him as a great prophet while the Jewish world admits admiration of his character and teaching as expressed in the Gospels. Great intellects like Galileo, Isaac Newton and John Milton exalt the name of Christ above all others. Powerful leaders and conquerors greatly admired Jesus' ability to sway multitudes of people to follow him. Napoleon once said that Jesus was no mere man. "Jesus built the greatest of empires," he said, "but unlike men who build their kingdoms with force, Jesus founded his upon love and to this very day millions would die for him."²

What is your opinion of Jesus Christ? Is he just a good man? Is he only a prophet? Is he a deceiver? Just who is Jesus Christ? These represent legitimate questions that the Lord knew would surface repeatedly. For example, in Matthew 16:13-16 the Bible records this conversation between Jesus and his disciples:

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi," wrote Matthew, "he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some [say that thou art] John the Baptist: some, Elias; and

² *The Life of Christ*, Cunningham Geike, American Book Exchange, New York, 1890, p. 8.

others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Confession played an important role in the early church. Peter confessed “Christ” as “the Son of the living God.” Following this confession, Jesus promised to build his church upon that unchangeable fact. The early church understood and taught that people must confess their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul told the Romans in chapter ten verse nine, “...if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” In Acts 8:37 when the Ethiopian Eunuch asked to be baptized, Philip told him “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Did the Eunuch make the proper confession? Well, the fact that Philip proceeded to baptize the Eunuch is proof that his response was in keeping with God’s word.

The salvation of man depends upon the proposition that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. If he is not the Son of God, he is an impostor. If he is not the Son of God, there is no church and the entire scheme of redemption fails. If he is not the Son of God, scripture becomes a myth and we are under no obligation to believe in Him or obey His word. On the other hand, if he is the Son of God every man and woman who believes in Him is obligated to profess his or her faith. Jesus said in Matthew 10:32-33 “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” Is it not clear that the believer should confess his or her faith in Christ before men? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? If so, are you willing to confess your faith before men?

The Apostle John tells the story in his Gospel about a young man whose sight Jesus restored. In John chapter nine, the Apostle says that Jesus spit on the ground and made a small amount of clay, placed it on the eyes of the young man and told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Miraculously the young man’s sight returned. When the Jews heard about it they began to investigate and eventually called on the young man’s parents to verify his healing.

The parents were afraid to answer the Jews because as John says in verse 22, “...they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.” Obviously some early believers in Jesus were confessing him as the Christ or else the Jews

would not have been threatening to throw people out of the synagogue. Sadly, these Jewish parents were very careful not to ‘confess’ that Jesus was the Christ in fear of being ejected from their synagogue despite the great miracle they witnessed.

The same Apostle, John later wrote regarding confession in his first epistle, chapter 4, and verse 15, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” Scripture is quite specific when it comes to the method and purpose of confession. In his letter to the Philippians chapter 2 verses 10 and 11, Paul wrote “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of [things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth; And [that] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ [is] Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Also, in Romans 14:11 Paul writes, “For it is written, [As] I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” In these passages, God tells us implicitly to “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” and to do it with the “tongue.” Combine this with the information we learned from Romans 10:9-10 and we know without a doubt that a “confession” of the Lord Jesus Christ is a prerequisite or condition of salvation and this confession is to be made “with the mouth.” You do not make it with a nod of the head or a wave of the hand nor do you do it through acts of charity toward others. Confession is “with the mouth” and “unto salvation.”

The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy about his confession. In 1 Timothy 6:12-13 Paul reminded the young man to “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and [before] Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession.” It is interesting that Jesus promised to “confess” before his Father in Heaven anyone who would confess him before men. Then, Paul describes Timothy’s profession or confession as being “before many witnesses.”

What is the proper confession that you should make upon your belief in Jesus Christ? We want to briefly investigate the confession Timothy made. Did he simply confess, “Jesus is Lord?” On the other hand, did he confess, “Jesus Christ is the Son of God?”

Based upon the description Paul gives in 1 Timothy 6:12, Timothy confessed the same thing that Jesus confessed before Pontius Pilate. Unfortunately scripture does not tell us exactly what Jesus confessed. He did not specifically say, “I am the Son of God” or “I am the Lord.” So, what did

Jesus profess that Timothy confessed as well? Toward the end of Matthew's Gospel the mob around the cross of Jesus began to mock him. According to Matthew 27:40 they cried out "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." And later in verse 43 the people said, "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God." Where did the Jews get the idea that Jesus claimed to be God's Son? It could only come from the confession Jesus made before Pilate. If Paul described this as the "good confession" made by the Lord, then it must be the "good confession" made by Timothy before many witnesses. Every believer must make this "confession" with the "mouth" for salvation.

There are those who teach that we should confess, "Jesus is Lord." Certainly, we do not deny that Jesus is our Lord, but this particular phrase is a general statement about Jesus and not a specific statement of who he is. We might work for a man we call our 'boss' but it would not necessarily tell people that he is the President of the company.

In Acts chapter nine as Saul of Tarsus traveled to Damascus, a great light shone around him. Frightened he fell to the ground. Suddenly a voice called out (v. 4) "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Then Saul asked (in v. 5), "Who art thou Lord?" Saul knew immediately that this was a supernatural communication and that the source was superior to him, and the term 'Lord' indicates just that. However, Saul's use of the word 'Lord' was not an acknowledgement that Saul knew this was God's Son! In fact, after he is told, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest..." he asks in verse 6 "Lord, what would you have me to do?" Saul hears, "I am Jesus" not "the Christ" or "the Son of God" but Jesus the one who had been crucified and the one against whom Saul had been fighting. Saul did not know this was Christ, the Son of God yet he still calls Jesus "Lord." Was he confessing that Jesus was God or the Christ? No, he simply was acknowledging at this point at least that Jesus was superior to him.

It has become common for men and women to dismiss the necessity of confessing that Jesus is the Christ or the Son of God. Men argue that there is no command or example that a formal 'confession' is necessary in the process of redemption. However, if the Bible teaches, as we have seen, that we must confess Christ with the mouth, unto salvation, after faith and before baptism, then failure to do so will bring no expectation that we shall receive the benefits promised? If Timothy made his "good confession" for eternal life and we dispense with it, will we inherit the eternal life for which Timothy made the confession? If God's word tells us "that every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord" and we fail to make it, will we not have to make it when the Lord returns? If Jesus tells us to confess Him before men and we fail to do it, will he still confess us before His Father?³

~ David Smith

³ *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, T. W. Brents, Gospel Advocate, Nashville, 1957, pp 259-260.

Baptism

Once a sinner believes in Jesus Christ, repents of his sins and confesses his faith—that he believes Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and Lord of his life—he is, then, ready to be baptized for the remission of sins. Jesus promises, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Baptism is not optional. The Lord requires it! There are thirty-five references to Christian baptism in the New Testament, emphasizing its importance. Obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ culminates in this beautiful expression of a person’s faith, repentance and confession.

Christian baptism is the point at which a sinner is washed clean by the blood of Christ and adopted into the family of God. Men and women who are able to hear and understand the gospel must believe and be baptized for salvation. Christian baptism is an immersion in water symbolizing the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and corresponding to a believer’s death to sin, burial of the old sinful life, and the resurrection to a new life in Christ Jesus.

Before Jesus ascended back to His Father in heaven, He commissioned His disciples to preach the good news about salvation to the world. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus highlights the significance of baptism as a distinct part of His commission. He says,

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 of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

The singular purpose of Christ's commission is plain: Go therefore and make disciples (teach—KJV) of all the nations! The commission extends world-wide, "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus was careful to articulate the process or method we are to follow as we fulfill this great commission: (1) baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and (2) teaching obedience to all the commandments of Jesus. Grammatically, making disciples involves both baptizing and teaching. Thus, in capsule form, Matthew records for us the great commission of Jesus Christ. Jack Cottrell comments on Matthew 28:19-20:

The first thing that strikes us about this passage is the fact that baptism is mentioned *at all* in such a terse and fundamental commission. It is also significant that it is distinguished from the category of "all things" which the disciples must be taught to observe. This is especially important in view of the common Protestant view that baptism is just one of the "good works" of the Christian life, that it is just an "act of obedience" comparable to the many other acts of obedience that we are to perform simply because God has commanded them. . . . The way the commission is worded suggests that baptism has a unique importance in the process of disciple-making . . . It has a meaning distinct from any act of obedience expected of a Christian, and an importance far beyond that of any of these acts.⁴

Cottrell notes the "unique importance" that Jesus places on baptism in His commission. In this passage, we see the design of baptism. A believer is not baptized to join a church or place membership. A believer is not baptized because he is already saved. A believer is not baptized because baptism is one of the many good works that Christians should observe. *The reason a believer is baptized is to become a Christian, a disciple of Christ Jesus.* Without baptism there is no discipleship. Without discipleship there is no salvation, no hope of eternal life.⁵

⁴ Cottrell, Jack (1989). *Baptism: A Biblical Study*. Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., p. 12.

⁵ Notice the wording of Mark 16:16. Jesus says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." Jesus does NOT say, "He who believes is saved and then baptized."

When we turn to the pages of New Testament history, *The Book of Acts*, we see that the apostles did administer baptism to those who believed on Jesus. In Acts 2:41, the Bible says, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized.” Baptism is the proper response of a believing heart. The apostle Peter writes, “There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). Peter describes two important aspects of Christian baptism: (1) the fact that baptism saves us and (2) that baptism is “the answer of a good conscience toward God.” Let us take note of these two points, beginning with the latter and then the former.

The word “answer” or “pledge” (NIV) may indicate the legal or contractual agreement made between two parties. In this case, the two parties consist of the believer and God. Concerning the Greek word translated “answer” here in 1 Peter 3:21, W. E. Vine says, “It was used by the Greeks in a legal sense, as a ‘demand or appeal.’ Baptism is therefore the ground of an ‘appeal’ by a good conscience against wrong doing.”⁶ The concept of commitment associated with baptism is clear.

The concept of baptism presented in 1 Peter 3:21—an appeal, answer, or pledge—sheds light on the statement made by a man named Ananias and recorded in *The Book of Acts*. Ananias is the preacher who administered baptism to Saul of Tarsus. Ananias shared Peter’s understanding of baptism as “an t 95(n)

statement in Acts 3:19. The former passage states, “Repent, and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins.” The latter passage states, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” We see, then, that baptism and conversion are made parallel in the apostle’s preaching. Can there be any doubt whether or not the apostle understood baptism’s significance for salvation? No doubt about it, baptism is necessary for salvation.

Every case of conversion in the early history of the church as recorded in *The Book of Acts* includes and culminates in Christian baptism. Salvation and discipleship are realized events at the moment of Christian baptism. In writing to the church at Rome, the apostle Paul says,

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).

Out of the waters of baptism, we rise to follow Jesus—having been made a disciple. We rise to “walk in newness of life.” This author has struggled to describe the importance of baptism as the—for lack of a better word—“culmination” of conversion. Baptism is not the end, however. Baptism is the beginning of a new life in Christ, a walk of discipleship and holiness. Nonetheless, one cannot rise to a new life without first dying to the old life. Baptism is the place where this amazing transformation is accomplished “in the working of God” (Colossians 2:12).

~ Ryan Connor

If you would like more information about God's plan of salvation, the Lord's church, or other Bible teachings, then please visit our website:

www.livingletters.org

Study Guide

Chapter 1: Faith

1. What is the most important question any man or woman may ask?

2. Faith, a _____, describes what we have and 'believe,' a _____, describes what we do.

3. What is it impossible to please God without? _____

4. To whom is Jesus the gift of God? _____

5. What does Romans 10:17 tell us about the source of faith? _____

Chapter 2: Repentance

1. All sinners must _____ (See Mark 2:17; Luke 13:3, 5).

2. God . . . commands all men everywhere to _____ (See Acts 17:30).

3. Repentance begins on the _____ of a person and has results seen on the _____.

4. Repentance is NOT:

a. _____

b. _____ or _____

c. _____ _ _ _____

d. _____ or _____

5. Repentance IS _____ to God in _____ of faith.

Chapter 3: Confession

1. _____ played an important role in the early church.

2. "...if thou shalt _____ with thy _____ the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (See Romans 10:9).

3. "Whosoever shall _____ that Jesus is _____, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." (See 1 John 4:15).

4. According to Paul, who professes a good profession before many witnesses? _____

5. If Timothy made his "good confession" for eternal life and we dispense with it, will we inherit the eternal life for which Timothy made the confession?

Chapter 4: Baptism

1. Baptism is not _____. (See Mark 16:16).

2. Christian baptism is the _____ at which a sinner is _____
_____ by the blood of Christ and _____ into the family of God.
3. Peter describes two aspects of Christian baptism: (1) _____
_____ and (2) _____
_____. (See 1 Peter 3:21).
4. “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be _____, and wash away
your _____, *calling on the name of the Lord*” (See Acts 22:16).
5. Every case of _____ in the early history of the church as recorded
in _____ includes and culminates in Christian baptism.
6. Which of the following is not essential for salvation? _____
- a. Faith
 - b. Repentance
 - c. Confession
 - d. Baptism
 - e. None of the above!

NOTES: