

Is “Belief” All That is Necessary for Salvation?

“BELIEVE on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever **believes** in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). These two scriptures are often cited by sincere people who teach that *all* an individual has to do to be saved is to “believe.”

Yet, will “belief” *alone* lead to one’s salvation? Is that what your Bible teaches? There is no question on earth that should be more important to you personally!

Other Scriptures Reveal More

The eighth chapter of John discusses some Jews who “believed in” Christ (verse 30). They believed on the person of Christ, but did not believe His **words** (verses 45-46). They accepted the Messenger (Mal. 3:1), but rejected His Message! They “believed” on Christ, but they actually sought to kill Him! (verse 40). Obviously, their *belief* did not save them!

The common teaching is that we merely need to believe on Christ’s existence and on His sacrifice---and that we are thereby saved. Yet, “Even the *demons* believe---and tremble!” (James 2:19). Does their belief save them? No!

Notice Rev. 21:7-8. “He who *overcomes* shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Consider that this passage in Revelation was written *after* the Temple was destroyed---and about sixty years after everything that was nailed to the cross *was* nailed to the cross. Yet, this passage says that *how people live*---whether they are sexually immoral, idolaters, liars, etc.---will directly influence whether they are saved or whether they meet a second death in the lake of fire.

Furthermore, well after the time of Christ’s crucifixion, similar statements were written by the Apostle Paul. “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will **not** inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19-21). (Also, I Cor. 6:9-10)

How can these scriptures be reconciled with the scriptures we saw earlier about believing on Christ and you will be saved?

First of all, belief on Christ is absolutely essential! Yet, *other* scriptures make it plain that belief is not *all* that is required before God will grant salvation to an individual. In other words, *other scriptures show what **true** belief entails!*

A True Believer

In John 14:21, Christ describes a *true* believer---one who really *loves* Christ: “He who has My *commandments* and **keeps** them, it is *he* who loves Me.” John, who is sometimes referred to as “the Apostle of Love,” said this: “For this **is** the love of God, that we **keep** His commandments” (I John 5:3). Paul said that many people “**profess** to know God, but **in works** they *deny* Him, being abominable, **disobedient**, and disqualified for every good work” (Titus 1:16).

What about James? He said, “faith *without* works is dead”! (James 2:26). Furthermore, Christ said, “why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not **do** the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

Finally, notice I John chapter 2: “Now *by this* we know that we know Him, *if we **keep** His commandments*. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does *not* keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (verses 3-4).

Is it any wonder, then, that Satan, the great *deceiver* (Rev. 12:9), tries to make people think that there is nothing at all that we must *do*---just believe!? Satan urges us to just be *sentimental* about Jesus, and believe in His sacrifice---and that’s all there is to it! He whispers, “Don’t be too concerned about the details of what Christ and the apostles actually *taught*.... just believe!”

Salvation is CONDITIONAL

It is totally impossible to *earn* salvation! Salvation---eternal life in God’s glorious Kingdom---is such a wondrous gift that nothing you could do could ever begin to *earn* it!

However, God does make salvation **conditional**! It is conditional upon our acceptance of Jesus Christ as our personal Savior (John 3:16; Acts 16:31), and it is *also* conditional upon our surrendering our life to God that we will henceforth strive to live by God’s spiritual law---the law summarized by the Ten Commandments.

With regard to God’s spiritual law, Christ said, “**all** the law” hangs on the two great commandments to **love** God and to **love** fellowman (Matt. 22:36-40). Yes, the first four of the Ten Commandments show the basics of how to love God, and the last six show the basics of how to love fellowman. The Ten Commandments are then further magnified throughout the Bible, especially in the New Testament.

In fact, one reason Christ came to earth was to “*magnify* the law” (Isa. 42:21, KJV). Rather than abolish God’s laws of love, Christ made these laws even *more* binding---showing that we are to live by even the spirit and *intent* of those laws (Matt. 5:17-28).

A young man once asked Christ, “what good thing shall I do that I may **have** eternal life?” (Matt. 19:16). How did Christ reply? Did He say, “Oh, there’s nothing you must **DO**---just believe!”?

No. Instead, Christ replied, “if you want to *enter* into life, **keep the commandments**” (verse 17). Christ then continued in verses 18-19, showing that He was referring to the Ten Commandments.

So, Christ plainly showed here that salvation is *conditional* upon our striving to live by the Ten Commandments. Likewise, notice Revelation chapter 22 (again, written about 60 years *after* Christ’s crucifixion): “Blessed are those who **do** His commandments, that they may have the **right** to the tree of life...” (verse 14).

Notice what Christ said in Matthew chapter 7: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice **lawlessness!**’” (verses 21-23).

Notice verse 19 of Acts 3: “**Repent** therefore and be converted, **that** your sins may be blotted out...” Here, Peter explains that in order for one’s sins to be forgiven (or “blotted out”) the person must *repent*---that is, turn his life around, to a life of *obedience* unto God’s Word.

John’s explanation was similar: “But **if** we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (I John 1:7). So, it is only “**IF** we walk in the light”---**IF** we walk, or live, according to God’s word (Ps. 119:105)---that the blood of Jesus Christ “cleanses us from all sin.”

If a person has *not* surrendered his life to live by God’s word, then Christ’s shed blood is *not* applied to that person---and does *not* cleanse him from sin! The person’s sins are *not* “blotted out”---*not* forgiven!

In I John 2:2 we are told that Christ “is the propitiation for our [true Christians’] sins, and not for ours only but *also for the whole world.*” This is speaking of *when* the unconverted of the world come to real repentance and faith in Christ (Rom. 8:1; I John 5:12). (For a better understanding of this, request the following *free* booklet from www.TomorrowsWorld.org: *Is This the Only Day of Salvation?*)

Yes, salvation is *conditional*. It is conditional not only upon belief on Christ, but also upon surrendering your life to strive to live according to God’s spiritual law, as summarized by the Ten Commandments.

Ask yourself this question: Is a person *earning* his salvation by his belief on Christ? No! He is merely fulfilling a *condition* for salvation. And, *likewise*, when he surrenders his life to strive to live by God's spiritual law, he is fulfilling a *condition* for salvation. Again, nothing you could do could ever begin to *earn* salvation!

Still to Obey?

All through the Bible---both Old and New Testaments---we are commanded to stop *sinning*. And, since "sin" is *defined* as "the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4, KJV), we are therefore commanded all through the Bible to *stop transgressing God's law!*

Christ said this: "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice **lawlessness**, and will cast them into the furnace of fire..." (Matt. 13:41-42). Also, the saints are described as those "who **keep the commandments of God**" (Rev. 12:17; 14:12).

We are also told that God gives His Holy Spirit only "to those who **obey Him**" (Acts 5:32).

Two Natures

Every human being is born with, and has, human nature. Is human nature inherently "good"? Is it naturally "in tune" with God and His way? No! "...the carnal mind [the *natural* mind, which we all have from birth] is **enmity [hostile] against God**; for it is not **subject** to the *law* of God, nor indeed *can be*" (Rom. 8:7). "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately **wicked**..." (Jer. 17:9). "...truly the hearts of the sons of men are *full of evil*..." (Eccl. 9:3).

So, the carnal, natural mind is *not subject* to God's spiritual **law**. As explained in Rom. 8:4-9, it is only **by receiving God's Holy Spirit** that one can become "spiritually minded" and become *able* to live according to God's spiritual law---both the letter *and intent* of that law.

In receiving God's Spirit, one becomes a partaker of God's very nature---"the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4). God's divine *nature* is in perfect harmony with God's *law*---which is the way of Godly *love*.

Yet, if a person *receives* God's Holy Spirit---partakes of God's divine nature---the person's own human nature remains! The person then has *two* natures: God's divine nature, and his own carnal, human nature. And these two natures are at constant *war* against one another! "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are *contrary* to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17). The Apostle Paul describes this war at some length in Romans 7:15-25.

Yes, even Paul had to *struggle* against his own human nature and Satan. He gives us this admonition: "do not **let** sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (Rom. 6:12). Paul said, "I

have **fought** the good fight..." (II Tim. 4:7). "...I *discipline* my body and bring it into subjection..." (I Cor. 9:24-27).

If a person has God's Holy Spirit dwelling within him, then God's Spirit *guides* the person, and *enables* the person to fulfill God's spiritual law. It *enables* him to live by the spirit and intent of that law (Ezek. 36:26-27). Yes, God's Spirit guides him, but it does not *force* him. It is up to the individual whether he *follows* that guidance!

It is *not* true that Christ "did it all for us." We have *our* part to do! It is a *requirement* of God that we **strive** to live according to His word. "*Strive* to enter through the narrow gate," said Christ (Luke 13:24). "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, *striving* against sin" (Heb. 12:4). Notice Paul's comment: "if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I *press on*, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I *press toward* the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:11-14).

It's certainly true that no Christian will ever *attain* perfection in this life. Yet, God requires that we strive *toward* perfection. "Be ye therefore *perfect*, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," said Christ (Matt. 5:48, KJV). We are to be "bringing every *thought* into captivity to the *obedience* of Christ" (II Cor. 10:5). Christ also instructs us to *live* "by **every word** of God" (Luke 4:4).

How does God want us to regard His written word? "But on *this* one will I look: On him who...**trembles** at My word" (Isa. 66:2).

If God's Spirit dwells within you, it is actually Christ living *His* life within you (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:9-10). To the *extent* that you yield your life to Christ's guidance, Christ then lives, in you, the **same** manner of life He lived 2,000 years ago---a life of *obedience* to God's law! "Jesus Christ is the **same** yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

You then begin to take on the very *mind* of Christ (Phil. 2:5)---a mind of humble *obedience* to God (verse 8)---an attitude of "not My will, but Yours, be done"! (Luke 22:42).

Again, we have our part to perform; but it is *only* by having God's Spirit within us that we *can* fulfill God's will of living by both the letter and the "spirit and intent" of His spiritual law.

Receiving God's Holy Spirit

How can a person come to have God's Spirit dwelling within him? Peter sums up the answer for us: "*Repent*, and let every one of you be baptized *in the name of Jesus Christ* for the remission of sins; and you **shall receive** the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

At baptism, we actually enter a *covenant* (or agreement) with God. God agrees to give us His Holy Spirit *on the condition that* (1) we accept Christ as our Savior, and (2) we **repent of**---turn from---our past way of life. We make an unconditional *surrender* to God---that we will henceforth *strive*, with the help of the Holy Spirit---to live in accordance with God's *spiritual law*.

As we're told in Acts 5:32, God gives His Spirit only "to those who **obey** Him"---only to those who have repented---only to those who are *striving* to live God's way. True Christians---also called "saints"---are described as "those who **keep** the commandments of God" (Rev. 14:12; 12:17).

So, upon entering that agreement with God at baptism, the individual (upon having hands laid upon him) then *receives* God's Spirit. It is the **death** of the old self and the start of a whole *new* life! (Rom. 6:3-6, 12-13).

Yes, at baptism the person begins a new life of being "a living sacrifice" unto God (Rom. 12:1). He enters a lifelong process of having God's **laws** written in his mind and placed in his heart (Heb. 10:16).

Occasional Slips

Jesus Christ made it plain that a person's salvation is *conditional* upon a life of obedience to God (Matt. 19:16-19; 7:21-23). Paul showed the same thing (Gal. 5:19-21; I Cor. 6:9-10). Yet, does this mean that if the Christian is *less* than totally obedient---*less* than totally perfect for the rest of his life---that he will not be saved?

No! But it does mean---as other scriptures show---that it is an absolute requirement of God that we strive *toward* perfection! (Matt. 5:48, KJV; Luke 4:4; II Cor. 10:5). Yes, we must strive! "Then one said to Him, 'Lord, are there few who are saved?' And He said to them, "**Strive** to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:23-24). (Also, see Heb. 12:4 and Phil. 3:11-14.)

At baptism, the Christian *turns from* his past sins, and---with the help of God's Spirit within him---he strives to refrain from committing those, or any other sins, again. He now *wants* to live God's way. He now *strives* to live God's way. And, in general, God's way is now *his habitual way* of life. Yet, on occasion, he slips and commits sins---though fewer and fewer, as he *grows* in grace and knowledge (II Peter 3:18).

However, such an occasional slip or sin---each time sincerely repented of---does *not* mean that he has rejected God and His way of life.

Such occasional slips committed by a person who is truly striving to live by God's word, and who *confesses* each sin and *repents* each times he slips---such acts of sin are entirely **different** from sin committed by one who has *not* surrendered his life to God in obedience---*even if* this latter person professes Christ! (Matt. 7:21-23).

Yes, very few understand the extremely important *difference* between (1) sins committed by an individual who has **not** surrendered his life to God---who has not received the Holy Spirit, and (2) occasional slips committed by one who *has* made an unconditional surrender of his life to obey God's word, but who falls short from time to time.

If a person accepts Christ and comes to the point of deep repentance (surrendering his life in obedience to God) and is baptized, then he receives God's Spirit and becomes a newly begotten "babe" in Christ (I Peter 2:2). As a "babe," he must then grow. And such growth comes as he increasingly walks according to God's commandments (II John 6). Yet, as he grows, this "babe in Christ" stumbles and falls on occasion---just as a small child stumbles and falls as he learns to walk.

Living according to God's spiritual law now becomes an ever-present, *fixed and primary goal* of this newly begotten child of God. With the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, God's way increasingly becomes the person's *habitual way of life*. Still, he falls short from time to time, and sins. "If we say that we *have no sin*, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we [as Christians] **confess** our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:8-9).

Yes, Christ *forgives* the sins of a Christian---as long as the individual confesses his sins and continues striving to "walk in the light" (verse 7)---striving to live "by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). When the Christian slips, he repents, and ---with God's help---he strives to more perfectly live God's way.

Such sin, each time repented of, is entirely *different* from sin committed by a person who has *not* surrendered his life to God. In reality, the one is forgiven, while the other is not! (Acts 3:19; I John 1:7).

In this regard, notice what Paul wrote: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will *not* inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9-10).

Is Paul saying that if anyone commits one of these acts that God will not allow the person into His Kingdom? No! Paul is referring to those who practice these things *as a way of life*---i.e., those who have not surrendered their lives in obedience to God---those who have not truly repented and received God's Spirit.

Consider the person who truly follows the instructions in Acts 2:38. He accepts Jesus Christ and thoroughly *repents* of his way of life---**a way that has been contrary to God's law (Rom. 8:7)**. The person is then baptized, which *symbolizes* both his acceptance of Christ **and a new way of life**---a life of striving to *obey* God's spiritual law (Rom. 6:3-6; I John 1:7; 5:3; Matt. 19:16-19; 7:21-23). Upon wholeheartedly following these steps spelled out in Acts 2:38, the person then has God's Spirit dwelling within him---and he is then ***in a different category*** than people who have *not* done so! He is then no longer "under the law"---i.e., no longer under the **penalty** of the law---which is death. Having been freed from the death penalty---having been freed from the penalty of transgressing God's spiritual law---the person is now **under grace**.

Christ's shed blood is then *applied* to that individual (Acts 3:19; I John 1:7). The person's past sins are then *forgiven*. His *future* sins will also be forgiven---but only as long as his attitude *continues* to be that of "walking in the light" and leading a *repentant* life---a life of striving to obey God's spiritual law.

In his new, obedient walk with Christ (Luke 6:46; 8:21; John 14:21; 15:14), the Christian sometimes stumbles and sins (I John 1:8-9). However, being under grace, he can then come to God in a repentant attitude (Acts 3:19), *ask forgiveness* in Christ's name---and *be* forgiven!

Not by Our Effort Alone!

Although we have an important part, *Christ's* part in all this is absolutely essential! Without Christ, we could *not* have our sins forgiven, we could *not* receive God's Holy Spirit, and we could *not* obey God's spiritual law in its spirit and intent!

"...make no mistake about it. The Christian cannot put sin out of his life *by himself*---without the help of his living Savior, Jesus Christ... We are *not alone* in our struggle against sin!... Yet, we must put forth *our own efforts*!... The Christian must *expel* sin---root, core and branch---out of his life. But he *cannot do it alone* without constant forgiveness for his slips and falls along the way---and without the active help of his Savior and High Priest who understands his every weakness." ¹

Yes, even though God requires us to *strive* to live His way, we have powerful *help* in our battle. The divine help that we have access to is described in Eph. 6:10-18, where we are admonished to "be strong *in the Lord* and in the power of *His* might. Put on the whole *armor* of God, that you may be **able** to stand against the wiles of the devil" (verses 10-11). We are to look to Christ, "the author and finisher [originator and perfecter] of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Without Christ, we "can do nothing"! (John 15:5). By our efforts alone, we are doomed to fail. "... 'Not by might nor by power, but **by My Spirit**,' says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). As Paul declared, "I can do all things **through** Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

In light of Christ's help and power, we can have great *confidence* that we will succeed in our journey towards God's glorious Kingdom. "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will *complete* it..." (Phil 1:6). At the end of our life, we, like Paul, can confidently say: "I have *fought* the good fight, I have finished the race, I have *kept* the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day..." (II Tim. 4:7-8).

Once Saved, Always Saved?

The Bible speaks of "salvation" in 3 ways---or as a process in three stages.

(1) Christ has *already* saved us from the death penalty which we have earned for our **past** sins. As explained above, Christ's sacrifice *applies* only to those who have accepted Christ, have truly repented, and have been baptized. Two scriptures that speak of salvation in this way are Rom. 3:25 and Titus 3:5. (Notice that verse 7 in Titus speaks of justification of *past* sins.)

(2) We also *are being* saved (present tense). That is, as long as the Christian *continues* his life of repentance and faith in Christ, then he is "on the road toward" final and ultimate salvation---i.e., on the road toward everlasting life in God's Kingdom. Both of the following scriptures speak of Christians as "*being* saved": I Cor. 1:18; II Cor. 2:15.

(3) Many scriptures speak of a Christian's *future and ultimate* salvation. Speaking of Christians, Christ declared, "But he who endures to the end *shall be* saved" (Matt. 24:13). The following scriptures likewise speak of a Christian as being saved *in the future*: Matt. 10:22; Rom. 5:9-10; John 6:27; James 1:12; Rev. 12:10; Acts 14:22.

Yes, to be *ultimately* saved, we must "endure to the end." And, *until* the end---i.e., **during any point in a Christian's life---it is possible for him to fall away and lose the Holy Spirit!** "For it is *impossible* for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, **if they fall away**, to *renew them again to repentance*, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:4-6). Other scriptures show the same thing: II Peter 2:20-21; John 15:2, 6; Heb. 10:26; 2:3; I Cor. 9:27; 10:12; Matt. 25:7-12, 23-30.

References:

1. "These Are The Appointed Feasts..." by Brian Knowles and John R. Schroeder, *The Plain Truth*, December 1978