

## What Does it Mean to Be Saved?

There are people to whom the idea of salvation in Christianity seems like a puzzling or even daunting concept. It's a word that gets thrown around a lot in religious circles, but what does it actually mean? When someone says they're "saved," what exactly are they saved from? And more importantly, how does one get saved?

These are questions that countless individuals have grappled with, and the answers aren't always clear. Some might think that being saved is about living a good life and doing enough positive things to outweigh the bad. They envision God as a cosmic scorekeeper, tallying up our good deeds and bad deeds, and if we come out on the plus side, we earn a ticket to heaven. But is that really what salvation is all about?

Others might view salvation as a matter of religious rituals or sacraments. They think that if they get baptized, take communion, or go through confirmation, that's what seals the deal for their eternal destiny. But is that what the Bible actually teaches?

Still others might see salvation as something that only "really religious" people can attain - those who pray for hours a day, read their Bible cover to cover, and never seem to make mistakes. They feel like they could never measure up to that standard, so they assume salvation must not be for them.

With all these competing ideas and perspectives, it's no wonder that so many people find the concept of salvation perplexing or even unattainable. But what if there's more to the story than any of these common notions? What if the true meaning of salvation is far more profound, yet far more simple, than most people realize?

At its core, the Christian doctrine of salvation is about having faith in Jesus Christ. It teaches that we are all sinners who fall short of God's perfect standard. No matter how hard we try, we can never be good enough on our own to have a right relationship with a holy God. That's where Jesus comes in. Christians believe that Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth, lived a sinless life, and died on the cross to pay the penalty for humanity's sins. Then he rose from the dead, demonstrating his power over sin and death.

So according to this view, salvation isn't something we can earn through our own efforts. It's a free gift from God that we receive by putting our faith and trust in what Jesus did for us. Ephesians 2:8-9 puts it like this:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Let's dive deeper into what the Bible teaches about salvation by faith and how it relates to the Christian practice of baptism.

## Saved by Faith Alone: What the Bible Says

When it comes to salvation, the Bible is clear that it's all about faith, not works. Romans 10:9-10 says:

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

Notice there's no mention of being baptized or doing certain religious rituals. It's about believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth. It's an inward faith expressed through trust and belief, not outward actions, that leads to salvation.

John 3:16, perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible, also emphasizes faith:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Again, it's all about believing in Jesus. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas what he must do to be saved, they replied (Acts 16:31):

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved"

So, the biblical evidence clearly points to salvation being received through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). But what about baptism? Isn't that something Christians are supposed to do? Let's look at the role baptism plays.

## What is Baptism Really About?

In the Bible, baptism is consistently portrayed as an outward symbol of the inward change that has already taken place when someone puts their faith in Christ. It's an act of obedience and a public declaration of faith, but not a requirement for being saved.

Matthew 28:19-20 records Jesus giving the Great Commission to his followers:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Baptizing others is something that disciples of Jesus were commanded to do as a response to faith, not a prerequisite for salvation. Sometimes we get this mixed up. This confusion is often a result of not fully grasping the simplicity of the doctrine of salvation causing some to conflate the two.



Some claim Mark 16:16 states that baptism is necessary for salvation. It says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” A closer examination of the verse reveals that it does not actually teach this. The verse makes two basic statements: 1) Those who believe and are baptized will be saved, and 2) Those who do not believe will be condemned. While it affirms that believers who have been baptized are saved, it does not say anything about believers who have not been baptized. The writer merely assumed all believers would be baptized as a result of saving faith. In fact, the second statement in the verse emphasizes belief as the sole condition for avoiding condemnation, which is consistent with the many other Bible verses presenting salvation (John 3:18, 5:24, 12:44, 20:31; 1 John 5:13).

Since baptism is not salvific what then is its purpose? Romans 6:3-4 explains the purpose and symbolism of baptism – it represents the believer’s identification with Christ’s death and resurrection:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Going under the water portrays dying to your old sinful self, and coming up out of the water portrays rising to new life in Christ. But the emphasis is on the spiritual reality that baptism

symbolizes, not on the physical act itself having some kind of mystical saving power.

## **Believer's Baptism: Faith First, Then Baptism**

The biblical pattern is for people to be baptized after they've put their faith in Christ, not before. This is sometimes called "believer's baptism" because the person getting baptized is old enough to consciously choose to believe and follow Jesus.

We see this in the example of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:36-38. As Philip explains the gospel to him, the eunuch sees some water and says, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" Philip replies, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch affirms his faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and then Philip baptizes him.

Similarly, when the Philippian jailer and his household put their faith in Christ, Acts 16:33 says he "was baptized at once, he and all his family." The clear order of events is believing first, then being baptized as a testimony of that faith.

## **Rightly Understanding Other Views**

Not every Christian tradition shares this "faith alone" view of salvation and baptism. Some, like the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, believe that baptism itself plays a role in salvation. They might point to passages like 1 Peter 3:21 which says, "Baptism...now saves you," or Mark 16:16 which says, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."

At first glance, these verses might seem to contradict the idea of salvation by faith alone. But let's look more closely. 1 Peter 3:21 goes on to clarify that it's not the mere act of baptism that saves, "not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The focus is still on the internal heart attitude, not the external ritual.





As we discussed earlier Mark 16:16 mentions both believing and being baptized, the second half of the verse puts the emphasis on belief: “But whoever does not believe will be condemned.” It’s lack of belief, not lack of baptism, that leads to condemnation.

Other passages like John 3:5 which mention being “born of water and the Spirit” are sometimes interpreted as referring to baptism. But in context, Jesus seems to be contrasting physical birth (“born of water”) with spiritual birth (“born of the Spirit”), not talking about baptism.

## Clarifying the Gospel Message

It’s important to understand and graciously dialogue with Christians who hold different views. But we also must be careful not to let secondary issues like the meaning of baptism distract or detract from the core gospel message - that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

The danger in viewing baptism as necessary for salvation is that it can lead to a works-based mindset and obscure the freeness of God’s gift. If we think we have to do something (like get baptized) to earn or complete our salvation, then we’re not really trusting in Christ’s work alone but rather adding our own effort also.

The apostle Paul faced a similar issue in the early church when some people were saying circumcision was necessary for salvation. He responded forcefully in Galatians 5:2, “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.” In other words, if you rely on a ritual like circumcision to be saved, you’re missing the point of the gospel.



In the same way, if we view baptism as a requirement for being saved, we risk nullifying grace and undermining the sufficiency of Christ’s work on our behalf. We’re saved by His merit, not by our actions or merit. Any obedience we show, including being baptized, is a fruit of our salvation, not a root of it.

### **Baptism’s Ongoing Significance**

None of this is to say that baptism is unimportant or optional. Remember, Jesus commanded His followers to baptize new disciples (Matthew 28:19), and the early church consistently practiced baptism for believers. Being baptized is an issue of obedience to Christ - if He tells us to do it, we should!

Baptism serves as a powerful public testimony. It’s a way of identifying yourself as a follower of Jesus and proclaiming your faith to others. It pictures the gospel message,

showing how you've died to your old way of life and been raised to new life in Christ. And it follows the pattern modeled by Jesus Himself, who was baptized by John the Baptist at the start of His public ministry.

So, while baptism doesn't cause salvation, it's certainly an important step of obedience that every Christian should take after being saved. It's not the means of salvation, but it is a meaningful sign that points to salvation.

## **Conclusion: The Main Thing is the Main Thing**

In the end, the most important thing is to keep the main thing the main thing - and the main thing is trusting in Jesus alone for salvation. We never want to let peripheral debates sidetrack us from the core message that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

If you've put your faith in Jesus, then you can have assurance of salvation, regardless of your view on the exact meaning of baptism. Romans 8:1 reminds us, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (By the way - if you have not put your faith in Christ - read our article: [Why Become a Christian](#))

At the same time, if you are trusting in Christ and walking according to His will, then He calls you to follow Him in baptism as a testimony of your faith. If you haven't yet taken that step, prayerfully consider doing so in obedience to our Lord.

May we be a people who passionately proclaim salvation by faith in Christ, who joyfully celebrate baptism as a sign of God's saving work, and who graciously extend fellowship to all who call on the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13). To God alone be the glory!