WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?
Acts 16:25-34

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Late one night, Paul and Silas sang hymns while imprisoned at Philippi. While the jailor was asleep, the Lord sent an earthquake resulting in the prison doors opening and the prisoners' bands (chains) being loosed. The jailor awoke and saw the prison doors open. Fearing the consequences of "sleeping on the job", he drew his sword to kill himself. From inside the prison, Paul cried out saying, *"Do thyself no harm: for we are all here."* The jailor then rushed in trembling, fell down before Paul and Silas, brought them out of the prison, and said, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* Their answer to the jailor's question was, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."*

What did the jailor want to be saved from? Many people have been taught that one must choose to believe on (or accept) Jesus in order to be saved (born again) and go to heaven when they die. They believe the word "save" or "saved" usually refers to eternal salvation, especially when used in a sentence or in context with portions of scripture which call upon us to believe, confess, and/or be baptized. Therefore, most Christians believe that the jailor was asking what he must do in order to be eternally saved. Consequently, they believe Paul is telling the jailor that he must *"believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"* in order to go to heaven. Let's analyze this interpretation in light of some of the other New Testament passages which utilize the words

"save", "saved", or "salvation." With these considerations in mind, we will then attempt to interpret the word "saved" as used in the sixteenth chapter of Acts.

There are many scriptures which refer to "getting saved" from dangers we may face in our daily lives. For example, the disciples said to Jesus, *"...Lord, save us: we perish." (Mat. 8:25)*. However, when reading the context of their statement, it is obvious that they are referring to being saved from the tempest in the sea *(Mat. 8:24)*. Also, when Peter began to sink as he walked on the water to go to Jesus, he said, *"Lord, save me" (Mat. 14:30)*. At that moment, Peter was not concerned with his eternal destiny. He was terrified of drowning. While the "saving" under consideration in these verses is obvious, other passages require a more careful study.

In the tenth chapter of Romans, Paul refers to belief, confession, and calling upon the name of the Lord as conditions of salvation *(Rom. 10:9, 13)*. As always, we must ask the question, "Saved from what?" Paul begins his discussion of this salvation in the first verse of the chapter. It is his prayer that Israel would be saved from *"going about to establish their own righteousness". (v. 3)* He desires that they be delivered (saved) from their constant efforts to "get right with God". Many people today live under this same burden. They believe that, in order to go to heaven, they must make sure they live good enough to earn

God's favor and then remain faithful or persevere to the end of their mortal life. However, once someone comes to understand (believe) that Jesus saved them when he died on the cross; it brings a deliverance (salvation) in their life. They are saved from the ignorance *(Rom. 10:3)* which they were living in when they were *"going about to establish their own righteousness."* The salvation in the tenth chapter of Romans concerns our state of mind. When someone learns that a conviction of sin is evidence that they have already been born again *(1 Cor. 2:14 & 1:18 Eph. 2:1, Ez. 36:26, Heb. 8:10 & 10:16, Mat. 5:3-4)*; they find peace, rest, and freedom from the bondage they were under *(Gal. 5:1, Mat. 11:28).*

In what is commonly referred to as "The Great Commission", Jesus said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..."* *(Mark 16:16).* If this is referring to eternal salvation, then we must conclude that baptism is a requirement in order to go to heaven. However, in Paul's long discussion about "being saved" in the tenth chapter of Romans, he makes no reference to baptism. If baptism were necessary to obtain eternal life, why doesn't Paul mention it? Furthermore, why did he tell the church at Corinth, *"I thank God that I baptized none of you..."? (1 Cor. 1:14)* and then, *"For Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel..." (1 Cor. 1:17).* Is Paul unconcerned about the eternal destiny of those to whom he preached? The salvation Jesus is speaking of is the same salvation Paul spoke of in the tenth chapter of Romans. There is a peace of mind (conscience) and therefore a deliverance in baptism because the person being baptized has come to understand that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ saved them from their sins *(1 Peter 3:21, Acts 8:38-39).*

Just prior to the baptism of about three thousand on the day of Pentecost, Peter had declared to the multitude, *"save yourselves from this untoward generation"* *(Acts 2:40).* During the course of Peter's preaching, many had come to realize that the man they crucified was actually the Son of God *(v. 36-37).* Consequently, they said, *"...Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (v. 37)* Peter then instructed them to *"...Repent, and be baptized..." (v. 38)* He then used *"many other words"* to persuade them to save themselves *"from this untoward generation".* Although the word "save" is used in connection with baptism, the salvation under consideration is specifically identified as a deliverance from the evil influence of this present world, not a deliverance from eternal hell.

In Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, he writes, *"...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil. 2:12).* Many who say that "believing" is a requirement (prerequisite) for eternal life, would deny that "believing" is a work. They emphasize this point because they recognize that eternal salvation is not of works. However, the verse I cited in Philippians specifically states that salvation is based on our works. Obviously, Paul is not referring to eternal salvation; otherwise, he would be contradicting himself in his other epistles *(Eph. 2:8-9, 2 Tim. 1:9).* Furthermore, if eternal salvation can be acquired through works, why did Jesus die on the cross? *(Gal. 2:21)* In reading the context of Paul's statement to the Philippians, it's easy to see that Paul is writing about a salvation that is based on our works; however, it is not an eternal salvation. In order to acquire consolation, comfort, fellowship, and mercy *(v. 1)*; we, as members of the church, need to be likeminded, have the same love, be of one accord, be of one mind, avoid strife or vainglory, esteem others better than ourselves, be unselfish, and have the mind of Christ *(vs. 2-5).* This requires a lot of work! A prevailing state of consolation, comfort, fellowship, and mercy in the church will save us from division, hating one another, pride, selfishness, worldliness, etc.

In the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, Paul teaches that we are saved by the gospel *"...if ye keep in memory what I have preached unto you, unless ye have believed*

in vain." (v. 2) If he is referring to eternal salvation, then we are required to *"keep in memory"* (hold fast or persevere in faith) in order to go to heaven. Paul is teaching here that there is a salvation (deliverance) experienced as we continue to embrace (believe) the gospel, i.e. the good news of what Jesus did to save us from our sins. Some of the churches of Galatia had lost this "gospel" salvation. Paul referred to this condition as *"fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4).* Clearly this does not mean that they lost their eternal salvation because he had just stated in the first verse that *"...Christ hath made us free".* He then identifies in what sense they had *"fallen from grace".* They were being influenced to believe that circumcision was necessary in order for one to be saved from their sins and go to heaven *(vs. 2-3).* Paul reminds them that *"Christ is become of no effect..." (v. 4)* if you think circumcision is necessary in order to have eternal life. In other words, if you think that being circumcised is what secures a home in heaven, then you do not need Christ. About 10 years prior to Paul's epistle to the Galatian Churches, the apostles and elders at Jerusalem had addressed this same issue, *"And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." (Acts 15:1)* After much disputing, Peter spoke up and said, *"...we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." (Acts 15:11)* Peter is saying that the uncircumcised Gentiles are saved the same way as the circumcised Jews, by the grace of God in Christ.

Someone once said, "Always interpret the unclear in the light of the clear." Although I do not consider the passage in the sixteenth chapter of Acts to be unclear, I do acknowledge that it is more difficult to interpret because it is an account of actual events, not a detailed document written for the purpose of explaining doctrine to the recipients of the letter. Although Paul eventually spent time in the jailor's home *(v. 34),* his statement about "being saved"

was made just outside the prison doors while the jailor was in a state of great unrest *(vs. 29-30).* He was trembling because of the obvious power of God manifested in the earthquake. Paul's instruction to *"believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"* would save the jailor from his present fear. His fear was removed once he came to understand the gospel. The jailor was able to *"rejoice" (v. 34)* once he came to realize that God loved him for Christ's sake. He was now able to see that God could be merciful to him because Jesus died to save him from the wrath to come *(1 Th. 1:10).*

The salvation the Philippian jailor experienced is available to those who meet the conditions: *"believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God" (Acts 8:37),* *"believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead" (Rom. 10:9),* *"confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus"(Rom. 10:9),* *"call upon the name of the Lord" (Rom 10:13),* believe and be baptized *(Mk. 16:16),"repent and be baptized"(Acts 2:38),* work it out *(Php. 2:12),* don't forget the gospel *(1 Cor. 15:2),* and don't fall from grace *(Gal. 5:4).* This is a salvation or deliverance we experience in this present world when we come to understand that Jesus saved us from our sins *(Mat. 1:21).* More spiritual blessings are then received when we are baptized upon a public profession of our faith in what He accomplished for us by His death, burial, and resurrection *(Acts 2:38, Gal. 3:27).* Following baptism, we then need to focus on *"saving ourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40)* and *"working out our own salvation"* within the local church *(Php. 2:12).*

When Adam sinned against God *(Gen. 2:16-17, 3:6),* he separated all of humanity from God *(Rom. 5:12 & 19a).* However, God loved an innumerable multitude of people *(Rev. 5:9)* whom He chose in Christ before the foundation of the world *(1 Pet. 1:2, Eph. 1:3-6).* Therefore, Jesus came into the world over two thousand years ago and saved *(Mat. 1:21, Heb. 1:3, 9:26, 10:14)* them by making himself an offering

to God for their sins *(John 1:29, Heb. 10:10).* He also gives them spiritual life. This "new birth" is not an event which they cause by confessing their sins to Him, accepting Him, believing on Him, etc. It is a work He alone does *(John 6:63, Eph. 2:1)* by sending his Spirit into their hearts *(Gal. 4:6)* when it pleases Him *(John 3:8).* Consequently, heaven will be their eternal home *(Mat. 25:34, 1 Th. 4:13-18).*

I have tried to identify two kinds of salvation. One is a salvation we have as a result of the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. God purposed it, Jesus secured it, and the Spirit applies it. God unconditionally loves an innumerable multitude of people and predestinated them to be conformed to the image of his son. Jesus died for their sins, thereby obtaining eternal redemption for them. The Spirit quickens them while they are yet dead in trespasses and sins, giving them eternal life. Nothing *"shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:39)*

The other salvation is all about blessings received in this present life as a result of hearing, understanding, and obeying the gospel; and living in obedience to God's written word. Primitive Baptists refer to this salvation as "temporal" or "time" salvation.