

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

by O.A. Burgess

To be saved, you must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, repent of your sins, and be immersed into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16, John 1:29, Acts 2:37, Acts 16:30, Acts 22:16, Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:12, 1 Peter 3:21

Topics: "Salvation By Faith", "Repentance Toward God"

Description

O.A. Burgess preaches on the crucial question 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' from Acts 16:30, emphasizing the importance of understanding salvation in the light of the New Testament. The sermon delves into the necessity of salvation from sin, highlighting that Christ's central mission was to save people from the power and consequences of sin. The answer to this question lies in three key elements: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance toward God, and immersion into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Transcript

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"--ACTS XVI: 30.

It is the purpose of the present discourse to answer, in the light of the New Testament, the above question. To exaggerate its importance would be impossible; to give it a wrong answer would be fatal to the best interests of humanity, and bring eternal ruin upon the individual soul. The question alike affects personal interests and human destiny, because the race must be lost unless the individual can be saved. The Scriptures are vast as eternity in their generalizations, yet so special that not one infant can draw the breath of life, not one sparrow fall to the ground, but they assure us of the Father's notice. By a simple analysis of the question now before us, it will be found to contain two distinct clauses; one looking to personal activity, expressed by the words "What shall I do;" the other looking to entire passivity, expressed by the words "that I may be saved." These two will be found to contain not simply the principles involved in the salvation of a certain Philippian jailer, but those involved in the salvation of every man from that day to this. If a further analysis of the question be made, it would be eminently proper to emphasize the word do: "What must I DO?" [167] This becomes the more obviously just and necessary, because, amid the Babel ideas of salvation, the words "think," "believe," "feel," "enjoy," et al., are almost universally substituted for the word DO, whereby many are led astray, and very few trembling sinners are ever truly answered the momentous question involving their salvation; whereby also many of the so-called saints are in great

doubt and perplexity a large part of their lives, because the road they travel being life-long, they are tremblingly awaiting the end, to know if they are in the right way; whereas, it was their most gracious privilege to have certainly known at the beginning; and this they would have done, had they been answered the question according to Christ, and not according to men. But before the question as to what the sinner must do can be truly answered, the word "saved," in the second clause, must be well understood. What, then, is salvation, and in what respect, or from what, is any human being to be saved?

Of course, it will not be necessary to pause here, to note any cavils that may arise with reference to the special case in hand; for, if any one should so far forget the candor and fairness necessary in the discussion of any question, and particularly one of such grave import, as to affirm that the jailer desired simply to be saved from punishment, because the prison-doors were open, or from danger, because there was an earthquake, such an one need only be reminded that the sequel shows entirely another state of facts; shows, indeed, that the jailer had only been aroused by these things to comprehend his own situation, and, to some good extent, the character of the men whom he had imprisoned; and that, therefore, he appealed to them in their character as ministers of Jesus Christ; and his willing and immediate compliance with the terms of their answer to his [168] question shows, beyond honorable dispute, how easy of understanding, and how easy of application, was the Gospel for the salvation of that sinner, and, therefore, for any other sinner.

But from what is man to be saved? If this were to be answered in the light of the religion of the present day, wherein the uprising and outflowing of joyful emotions is to be taken as both the condition and proof of religious life, then it could be supposed that to become a Christian, or "get religion," is to be saved from all "the ills that flesh is heir to." It may be well to answer the question first negatively, and ascertain from what man is not to be saved. The following may be safely affirmed: Christ does not propose to save man from the sorrows of this life, for the righteous are often most cast down and afflicted; nor from the poverty of this life, for the wicked wax rich, while the righteous beg bread; nor from temptations, for himself was tempted of the devil; nor from death, for Paul and Nero alike go back to dust; nor from eternal judgment, for every one must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, to give an account of the deeds done in the body. From these specifications, showing what men are not saved from, it might, almost in great alarm, be asked: Pray, then, from what are they saved? The first direct and unmistakable declaration on this subject may be found in the words of the angel to Mary: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." This declaration was never changed or modified. If Christ made special cases of salvation while he was on earth, it was only to demonstrate his ability and willingness to perform the great salvation. The great object before him was salvation from sin. Of this the prophets spoke; for this John the Baptist prepared the [169] way, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Toward this the whole life of Christ tended, and for the consummation of this even his life was offered up. Not an offering burnt upon Jewish altar, not a lamb bled by the hand of Jewish priest, that did not look toward the offering of an acceptable sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. Whatever details of doctrine may hereafter appear, here, at the very threshold of every religious inquiry, stands the unalterable truth, that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. If, therefore, the central idea in the offering of Christ was the shedding of his blood for the remission of sin, it follows that the central idea in the salvation of man is salvation from sin.

There are now two features in the question of salvation from sin, which deserve particular attention: these are salvation from the effects of sin already committed, and salvation from the overt act of committing sin. It must be apparent to the careful observer that the blood of Christ applies primarily and principally only to

the former, and only incidentally to the latter. Incidentally, because to one already washed from the stain of sins past, there is supposed to be given a strength to resist sin; a strength which comes through a knowledge of Christ, and a trust in his name. And it can only be when this strength is lost through lusts of the flesh, weakness of faith, or general inattention to the means of grace, that such an one washed becomes, in the ordinary sense, a sinner, and has need again of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. This brings the question, beyond dispute, to apply to the sins of the past; and to this Paul bears testimony, saying: "God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his [170] righteousness for the remission of the sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." This gives the true initial point from whence all observations are to be made touching the salvation of a sinner, and shows in clear light, and unmistakable terms, that when the solemn question comes--Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" it is equivalent to the inquiry: What must I do to be saved from, or receive forgiveness of, my past sins. This may seem reducing the question to even too narrow limits. If such a thought arise, it will be very readily removed by a few simple questions, such as, Why do men need salvation at all? The answer: Because of sin. Why is man alienated from the life of God? The answer: On account of sin. Why do you fear the judgment of God? Invariably and always the same answer: Because of sin. If, then, man be freed from sin, what need he fear? Not the ills of this life, for, though he must bear them, Christ will give him strength; not the power of the devil, for, though tempted by him, Christ is mightier than the devil; not the grave, for, though he must slumber in it, Christ has lighted its darkness, and broken its bonds; and surely not the future judgment, for, though he must stand there, Christ is his shield and his eternal defense. In a word, if man be freed from sin, life and death, time and eternity are all his, for he is Christ's, and Christ is God's. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved--from my past sins?--is a question, therefore, of such vast proportions and infinite import, that in it is more of human weal or woe than by the same number of words can otherwise be uttered by human lips.

With the true scope and intent of the word "saved," as used in the text, now clearly marked out, the real question, "What must I do?" may be considered. It has already been intimated that the force of this question is [171] often lost, just at the time its true use is most needed, by the substitution of other terms for the word do. To show that this word is not the accident of occasion, or the creature of the caprice of man, let the Scriptures testify. On one occasion three thousand cried out, saying: "What shall we do?" Paul himself, when met by the Savior, inquired what he should do? And the blessings of God, in the dispensations of the past as well as the present, are pronounced upon those who do his commandments. It having already been shown that the salvation spoken of, is a salvation from sin, it will plainly enough appear that whatever the sinner is called upon to do, is to be done in order to that salvation. One of two things will, therefore, follow: there must be something definite in form or doctrine, in the observance of which the sinner may know his sins are forgiven, or the answer may depend upon the ignorance or caprice of him to whom the question is addressed. If the latter be true, revelation may be set aside; for if a preacher, "on the spur of the moment," may give such answer as seemeth good in his own eyes, all revelation on that point would be a work of supererogation, a proposition so manifestly absurd and wicked that it should but be mentioned in order to be rejected; and yet with its manifest absurdity, it is the system at the present time most constantly practiced upon among those attempting to answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?" On the other hand, if there be a definite scriptural answer, those receiving and acting upon a wrong answer, their feelings and imaginations to the contrary notwithstanding, will fall to receive the pardon of their sins.

It is now to be affirmed that the Scriptures do contain an explicit answer to the question in the text; that this applied in the days of apostolic teaching equally and alike [172] to all; that whatever elements entered into

the answer as given to one sinner, entered into it as given to every sinner; and that, as Christ has not changed his laws, the same answer should be given to an inquiring sinner to-day. If it now be asked, what are the elements which make up a Scriptural answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" this is the reply:

1. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 2. Repentance toward God. 3. Immersion into the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit.

These, it will be shown, enter into each and every individual case; and that whenever the express mention of any one or more of these is omitted, that very omission will be found as proof that those elements have already entered into the occasion, and accomplished their work. It will be observed in passing, too, that there was little or no delay; that, immediately upon hearing the terms of salvation, they were complied with, and the promised pardon realized. It is true, indeed, that God requires fruits worthy of repentance; but it is equally true that he has graciously given the poor sinner the privilege of offering a broken spirit and a contrite heart, as richer than the pains of penance, and a willing obedience as more precious than the fat of rams.

A few words concerning each of the three above propositions separately.

1. Faith in the Christ. It is much to be regretted that, at the very first step toward a religious life, the inquirer is met by the disputes of theology and the subtleties of metaphysics, until he almost calls in question either the reality of religion itself, or the sincerity of those who profess it. The great question of faith has not escaped these snares. The tendency of the human mind to search [173] for hidden causes, trace remote results, and attempt deep diving, when the truth rests in clear and beautiful light just upon the surface, all lend obscurity and darkness, rather than dispel the clouds. Faith, for instance, is held as a sort of creature of anatomy, liable at any time to receive the theological dissecting-knife; and, as a student in medicine is not supposed to understand the human system until he has dissected and separately examined every part of that system, so it is held that man may not have "evangelical faith" until he understands its firstly, secondly, etc. How strongly this contrasts with the simple Scriptures, three or four of which will give the key to the whole subject of faith:

"These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing, you might have life through his name."--John.

"With the heart man believeth unto righteousness."--Paul.

"Faith without works is dead, being alone."--James.

Here it must be seen that faith is comprehended in few words. It has its object, Christ, and testimony that Christ may be believed in; its subject, man, with motives before him to induce him to believe; and its action or works, else it is dead, being alone; and it thus at once and forever lifts itself above the doubtful issues of intellectual combat, or the dicta of grave and reverend seniors, to that sublime height where, amid the pure and serene light of its Divine home, it may make its appeal to the heart of man, and offer him the deathless joys of the new and better Paradise of God. And this word heart simply signifies all the strength of intellect, all the warmth and depth of the emotions, and all the services of the life. So faith simply says to the inquiring sinner, Lay hold on [174] Christ with your whole heart, and surrender to him your whole life.

2. Repentance toward God. Repentance, like faith, is easy of apprehension when freed from the mysticisms of the schools. Repentance may be stated thus: Repentance is a sorrow for past sins, and such a sorrow as impels the sinner to turn away from those sins, and sin no more. Whatever terms may be used to explain or expand this statement, they will not add to its value, or increase its force. It may be urged, for example, that there should be a godly sorrow for sin; yet what sorrow can be more godly or more heart-felt than that which turns the sinner away from his sins to sin no more? God does not require penance of the sinner. The sooner, therefore, he ceases to sin, the sooner he may cease his sorrow; and as God desires joy to fill the heart, it is evident that repentance should be a speedy work, so that the man may dry his tears and rejoice in God.

But repentance is said to be "toward God." This is eminently proper, because his law has been broken by the sinner, and his character as a law-maker thereby challenged; for whether man will so acknowledge it or not, it is most certainly true that, whenever any law is broken, the immediate effect of that transgression is to call in question the ability or goodness of the law-making power. It is saying to that power, we will take the law into our own hands; we will be a law unto ourselves. Nor will it change the issue to complain that the law is based simply in authority; for there can be no higher test of obedience than by the simple recognition of authority. But whether the sinner be regarded as violating a law of moral qualities, or a law absolute, in either case he must be held as having committed the gravest of offenses against [175] God, and, therefore, his early and sincere repentance should be "toward God."

3. Immersion into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Of this it need only be said, it is the illustrative sequence of the above arguments. It places man in position to know for himself whether he will or will not surrender himself without reserve, and without conditions, to the authority of an absolute law-giver. And this test is put in the form of an immersion, in order that the entire burial of the body may show the entire giving up of body, soul, and spirit to Christ; and, whereas, no other single act can do this, so no other mode, institution, covenant, law, ordinance, commandment, or by whatever other name things or principles may be designated, can, by a single act, bring the penitent sinner into relation with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The ordinance, therefore, must not only be immersion, but immersion into these three names.

It only now remains to be shown, that the apostles of the Savior taught every man or woman asking what they must do to be saved, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, repent of their sins, and be immersed into the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let the case in hand, from which the text is taken, be the first. The jailer at Philippi, but a few hours ago, was nearly or altogether ignorant of the character of Christ and the mission of his apostles; and, under the command of his superiors, united, doubtless, with a will of his own, he had inflicted needless severity of punishment upon Paul and Silas, and thrust them into the stocks. He knew little till that night of the faith of Christ. It was, therefore, but the dictate of common sense, as well as Scripture order, that faith should be the first thing preached to him. As the [176] preaching proceeded, the simple narrative states that "the Word of the Lord" was preached unto the jailer and those in his house. The same hour of the night, the jailer was immersed. Now, it is to be admitted, that in the narrative repentance is not mentioned. To this apparent neglect of inspired men to present an element of the Gospel so important in the work of salvation, there may be two answers: first, the doctrine of repentance is held by all religious people to be of such consequence that an inference in its favor in this case might be presumed, and the concurrent assent of such would be, as is often done, taken by the inquirer as sufficient evidence of its necessity; second, and without this mere argumentum ad hominem, it is the true argument, simply to remind the querist or objector that "the Word of the Lord" was preached to

the jailer, and that repentance was an integral part of "the Word of the Lord," since the Lord himself had commanded that repentance and remission of sin should be preached in his name among all nations.

Paul and Silas could not, therefore, have been true to their Master on that occasion without preaching the entire Gospel. The history of the jailer now stands thus: That faith was preached to him, is known by positive declaration of Scripture; that repentance was preached to him, is known by inference amounting in effect to demonstration; and that immersion was preached, is also known by declaration of Scripture, for he was immersed the same hour of the night. To determine the immediate effect of all this upon the jailer as touching his question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" the Scriptures declare that he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house; and, if rejoicing is to be taken as an evidence of pardon, as so commonly held, or as properly held, the effect of the [177] knowledge of pardon, then, in either case, it must be conceded that the jailer obtained, the same hour of the night, just the salvation for which he asked.

Here the whole subject of this discourse might be rested, in the confident assurance that, as the Scriptures can not contradict themselves, the answer to a sinner at Philippi would be equally good in any other latitude or longitude of the world; and the answer, because eighteen hundred years old, is more than eighteen hundred times better than answers of more modern date and more popular fashion, its very antiquity taking it into the purity of apostolic teaching. But it has been promised to be shown that the other cases of the New Testament contain the same elements in answer. Let the attention, then, next be turned to Acts ii: 37, 38. Here, in effect, is the same question--What must we do? The answer, properly enough, begins with repentance. Faith is not mentioned. Here, too, the argumentum ad hominem might be resorted to. Every body holds faith necessary to salvation; and, therefore, every body will hold that faith was in some manner connected with this occasion, though not mentioned. The solution is, they were pricked in their hearts, and thus gave, in the estimation of the apostles, sufficient evidence of faith; and, without wasting words on learned disquisitions on faith, its parts or philosophy, the apostles moved right forward, commanding every one of them to repent and be immersed. In this they were promised the pardon of their sins, which, obeying, they received, as evinced by their rejoicing and gladness. In this, as before, it is found that faith, repentance, and immersion were preached in answer to the question, "What shall we do to be saved?" and that, without delay, the [178] terms were accepted, the salvation obtained, and their hearts made glad.

Let Paul's conversion come next. He asked directly of the Lord what he should do. The Lord honored him with no other answer than to go into Damascus, and there it should be told him. Then the Lord sent to him Ananias, who made a long sermon very short, by simply commanding him to Arise and be immersed. Paul obeying, straightway received his sight, ate his food, and was told without delay to preach the faith he once labored to destroy. In Paul's case, doubtless, above all others, the tricks of the sophist could be brought to bear, to show that nothing but immersion was preached to him; and thus give a far more plausible plea for salvation by water alone, as the Christians are sometimes slanderously reported as saying, than could be found for others in the plea for salvation by faith alone. But the Christians make no such plea. Paul, like others, had received, on his way to Damascus abundant evidences on which to build a faith in Christ. He had, in the very blindness with which he was stricken, a clear vision of his sins, of which he at once repented. There remained but one thing to save him from his past sins, and that Ananias immediately announced--Arise and be immersed. It is not to be doubted but Ananias might have discoursed eloquently on faith in all its parts; on repentance in all its emotions; but no such work was needed. The discourse that was needed was given, was obeyed, the salvation obtained, and the great

question, "What must I do?" again answered in the same terms, "Believe, repent, and be immersed."

It will now be proper to point out the chief characteristic on account of which these three instances have been [179] made representative. It is this: that at whatever point the preaching was needed, that being determined by the facts in the case, just at that point the preaching began. Thus, with the jailer, it began with faith, and ended with immersion; with the three thousand it began with repentance, and ended with immersion; and with Paul, it began and ended with immersion. In one of these, the mention of faith is omitted; in another, the mention of repentance; and in the other, the mention of both faith and repentance. Now, it has particularly been shown that these were not absent in fact because absent in name; and this, too, not because any body doubts their presence, but in order to show the proper argument for their presence, viz., that "the Word of the Lord" was preached; for while, by a common consent, the sectaries admit the presence of faith and repentance, even by remotest inference, they are equally ready to exclude immersion, though it be plainly mentioned. The burden of the argument, therefore, has been to repudiate the mere common consent plea, and show that if "the Word of the Lord" can not be preached without preaching faith and repentance, neither can it be without preaching immersion. And every candid person must admit that we have the argument clearly, since, in the three cases already used, or in those about to be used, the mention of faith and repentance is often omitted, the mention of immersion never.

No matter now which way the attention be turned, these principles remain unchanged. If the Ethiopian be inquired of, he will simply narrate that while reading Isaiah, without so much as knowing whether the prophet spake of himself or some other man, a preacher came along, and, beginning at the same Scripture, preached Christ. Not a word of the details of the sermon is given, [180] but a result reached is plainly stated: they came to a certain water, and the Ethiopian was immersed. If the Samaritans be inquired of, they simply respond that they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and were immersed, both men and women. The city of Corinth gives the same response, for, many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were immersed. Sister Lydia's heart is opened, and immersion immediately follows. If Peter and the Gentiles are sought after, that bold apostle is found demanding who dare forbid water for a grand immersion. And if the palaces of the Eternal City, so long echoing to the tread of the mighty Cæsars, be laid under contribution, behold, Paul is there, though in clanking chains, declaring that every Roman that received Christ had been immersed into him. Galatia and Colosse add their testimony, until, like colossal monuments, these truths tower to the very heavens, more splendid than gilded palaces, and more durable than marble and brass.

To make now a brief note of the negative of this whole subject, there will be found but one argument that ever has assumed even the show of plausibility; this is in the question, "What shall I do?" as addressed by a certain young man to the Savior. Various modifications of the same objection are found, as in the thief on the cross. These, however, will all receive the same answer. If, indeed, the answer which the young man received be taken as the standard, it would be quite as well to desist from all efforts to save men; for a part of that answer was, "Sell all thou hast, and give it to the poor." Such a method of salvation failed even in that case, though it was received from the Savior's own lips. There must be something wrong, either in the answer or in its application; the former can [181] not be true, for the Savior could not fall to suit the occasion; the mistake, therefore, must consist in attempting to make a general application of a special case, for nowhere afterward did Christ command that method of salvation to be preached. The same is true of the thief on the cross, and all similar cases of special salvation. The answer to the whole objection is, that while Christ was on earth, he used his power to forgive sin, as his power to raise the dead, just as it seemed good in his own eyes; but, being about to depart from earth, never more in person

to minister to the wants of men, he gave to his apostles a short and simple law, which should be equally applicable to the beggar and the prince, and in the acceptance of which all might be saved. This law he commanded them to preach in all the world, and this law contained the three terms, Faith, Repentance, and Immersion. If, therefore, any man or woman will inquire "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" let them consider for themselves how far their desire for salvation has already led them; if so far that they believe in Christ, let them repent; if so far that they have repented, let them be immersed; and let this be done according to Scripture example, immediately, that they may know they are pardoned, and be filled with joy and gladness. Moreover, let the servants of Christ, to whom such a momentous question may be addressed, consider well the occasion and surroundings, and, if like the jailer, there be an ignorance of Christ, let faith first be preached, but immerse, if need be, the same hour of the night; if like the three thousand, they already believe, preach repentance, and immerse the same day; but if like Paul, there be but one thing lacking, preach that one thing, and if the inquirer be as honest as Paul, he will be immersed straightway. [182]

Thus, in any and under all circumstances, when a sinner cries out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" the answer, in clear and explicit terms, is always at hand: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, repent of, and turn away from, your sins, and be immersed into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Happy is that minister of Christ, who knoweth to give such an answer; and thrice happy that man or woman honest enough and humble enough to receive and act upon it, for they shall receive remission of sins, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

May the day be not far distant, when the jargon of doubtful creeds, and the disputes of zealous sectaries shall be displaced by the Divine symmetry of heaven's own truth, and the earnest pleadings of a united Church; when salvation shall flow as a river, and all the ends of the earth be saved. [183]

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