

# What Must I Do to be Saved?

## TWO KEYS TO HEAVEN

“**Repent** then and **turn** (convert) to God, so your sins can be wiped away.”  
(Acts 3:19)

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”  
(Acts 16:20)

In Acts 15 Paul and his friends were prevented by the Holy Spirit from ministering in two areas they wanted to enter. God sent Paul a vision of a European man saying, “Come over and help us.” Paul took the gospel to Europe and in the town of Philippi, three conversions are reported. A wealthy Jewess from the upper class, a slave girl from the lower class, and a Roman jailer from the middle class; all turned to Christ. Lydia was there on business and her home was in the land of Asia Minor where Paul had just come from. He met her on a river bank in a Sabbath worship service, and “the Lord **opened her heart** to respond to the things Paul talked about.” (Acts 16:14)

When people in the Book of Acts asked how to be saved, three instructions were given: **Repent** (Acts 2:3); **turn** (convert) from sin (Acts 3:19); and **believe** (Acts 16:31). These three go together like fire, heat and smoke in what we call **conversion**.

We turn *from* a life controlled by wrongdoing (repentance) *to* Jesus by faith; believing He will forgive us, change us, and let us go to heaven.

When we speak of someone “turning their life around” this is a perfect description of becoming a Christian. It is like an army marching in one direction and when the leader says, “To the rear march!”; it turns around and starts walking in the opposite direction.

### A. Contact

Paul and Lydia met by God’s design. It may not be this dramatic, but God works to bring you and me into contact with the gospel. Jesus said, “**No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him.**” (John 6:44) Here in America you live in a land of churches and a thousand other ways to come into contact with the truth. Whether it was our mother singing “Jesus Loves Me” to us as a baby; a pastor’s sermon; or the witness of a friend; God reaches out and touches us.

### B. Conviction

Contact with the gospel is not enough. Because of our sinful nature we do not understand Christianity. In John 15:8, Jesus said:

“The Holy Spirit, when He comes, will convict the world about sin, about being right with God, and about Judgment.”

First Corinthians 1:18 and 2:14 says the gospel is:

“foolishness to those who are perishing / they cannot understand it / God has revealed it to us by His Spirit.”

Spurgeon said we can no more understand the gospel than a horse can understand astronomy. He says we are dead, and dead to the fact that we are dead. We are blind, and blind to the fact that we are blind.

Peter says, “We are born again through the living and eternal word of God.” (1 Peter 1:21) We come in contact with the truth and the Holy Spirit of God leads us to believe it. Paul says our faith, is “not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2)

We don’t understand it and we don’t want it. Romans 3:11 says, “No one *looks* for God.” We use Him for emergencies, like a spare tire; but we do not want Him in the driver’s seat. Adrian Rogers says a sinner no more looks for God than a mouse looks for a cat or a criminal looks for a policeman. God puts the “*want to*” into our hearts. That is why Hebrews 6 says the Holy Spirit, “leads us to repentance”.

It may come from an inner fire that drives you to church; from a friend who witnesses to you; or from a mother who sang, “Jesus loves me” above your cradle. God can use good or bad circumstances to get our attention. It can be the birth of a baby. Romans 2 says God’s “kindness leads us to repentance”. It can be the death of a baby. The Scottish comedian Harry Lauder said when his son died, “*For me it was alcohol, suicide, or God; and I chose God.*”

The great C.S. Lewis said he got on a bus, an atheist, and got off a Christian; and he still does not know what happened or why. I came to Christ because I grew up in a family that seemed to fight all the time. I used to have to check with my mother to see which uncle we were mad at. I wanted a good, loving, peaceful family and had enough sense to know that I needed to be a Christian and marry a Christian if I really wanted it.

When Pastor Jack Whitley came to my church, I was converted, and I began criticizing all the Pastors I had heard before; asking why they hadn’t preached the gospel. And if they did, I wondered why they didn’t make it plain and simple like him. The truth is, they did. I had not been listening. I was thinking about sports, girls and cars; or sometimes cars, girls and sports.

## C. Conversion

### 1. Faith

Faith is belief. Hearing God’s word we believe the *bad news* that we are sinners and are in trouble with God. This does not mean we are the meanest

people in our town; it means that we have chosen to run our own lives instead of letting God run them. It means we live basically selfish lives and not lives built on the golden rule. For most of us the most serious problem is not with the wrong we have done, but with the good things we have failed to do for our fellow man. We say, "My neighbor's throat I never cut / His purse I never stole / But for all the things I have not done / God have mercy on my soul,"

But thank God we also believe the good news that God loves sinners, God loves us, and He came to this earth in Jesus Christ to die on a cross so we can be forgiven. And this is *personal*. Paul said, "I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) Augustine, in the 400's AD said if he was the only person who ever accepted Christ, Christ would have died for him.

When I was a boy my hero was Mickey Mantle, the center fielder for the New York Yankees. Their team was in the World Series and on TV every year. Every boy wanted to be Mickey Mantle. But Mickey was an alcoholic and died early.

His team mate Bobby Richardson tried all through the years to win Mickey to Christ, all to no avail. When Mickey was in the hospital dying from liver damage, Bobby tried again and Mickey was converted. Bobby returned to his hotel room and told his wife the good news. She just couldn't bring herself to believe it, so she went to Mickey's hospital room. After a few remarks, she said, "Mickey, are you sure you are right with God?" Mickey flashed that big Oklahoma smile and said: "For God so loved *Mickey Mantle*, that He sent His only begotten Son, so if *Mickey Mantle* believes in Him, *Mickey Mantle* will not perish, but will have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Faith is also trust that *commits*, just as we entrust our money to a bank. It is action that turns intellectual belief into faith. Faith without works is dead. (John 14) If I yell to you that your house is on fire, and you thank me and praise me and sing songs about me, that does not mean you believe me. I know you believe me when you run out of your front door with a kid under each arm.

I love the story of the kid who watched a man walk on a tight rope across a roaring water fall. He did it blindfolded.

He did it with two pigs in a wheelbarrow. The little boy was his best PR man. He would yell at people passing by and tell them to come watch the amazing man. The man turned to the lad and asked, "Son, do you believe I can push this wheelbarrow across with a person sitting in it?" The little boy said, "Mister, I know you can do it." The man asked again, "Son, do you really believe it?" Hoping to see him push somebody across, he said, "Yes sir. I don't have a doubt in this world. I know you can." "OK," said the man, "Get in the wheelbarrow and I'll push you across." The little boy said, "It's time for me to go home and eat supper." And he took off for home.

He had belief but not trust. This is what we mean by accepting Jesus as our “personal Savior”. I do not know of any new belief I had after my conversion that I did not have before my conversion. I went to church all my life and I knew the facts of the gospel. But like a lot of people today, I was “12 inches from Heaven”: the distance between my head and my heart. Have you personally and prayerfully given Jesus your sins to forgive and your life to change and control?

Speaking of what we believe intellectually, we do **not** have to agree with all conservative beliefs. Fundamentalists give the impression that if someone does not believe in such things as an inerrant Bible; creation without evolution; a burning hell; and that all people outside of Christianity go to hell, etc., they cannot be saved.

Things like this put a barrier between us and God when we desperately want forgiveness and the power to be a better person. We come to Christ imperfect *morally* and we come imperfect *mentally*. We allow people to sing “Just as I Am” morally; so we need to allow them to sing, “Just as I Am” intellectually.

## 2. Repentance

The word repentance means a “change of mind” and that is exactly what we see in the “faith” (belief) we just talked about. But it moves to the heart and repentance is also sorrow. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says,

“Godly (God given) sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation, but the sorrow of the world brings death.”

The world’s sorrow is **regret**, feeling bad about what we do, but not being willing to change. Judas “regretted what he did, and went to the Priests and said, ‘I am guilty, I have betrayed innocent blood’.” (Matthew 27:3-4) Judas went to the wrong tree. Instead of going out and hanging himself, he should have gone to the foot of the cross for forgiveness.

Finally, it is commitment to live for God, with His help. Jesus told the woman caught in adultery--“Go and leave your life of sin.” (NIV) Paul said of his conversion--“We have died to sin; how can we go on living in it?” (Romans 6:1) When the people asked John the Baptist what they had to do to repent, he told them to share their possessions with the poor. He told the tax collectors to be honest and the soldiers to be kind and content with their wages. (Luke 3)

Remember, it is **willingness** that God wants, not ability. We cannot promise God we will never use profanity, be unkind, tell lies, etc., again. We can’t lose weight, much less promise to live like Jesus. But we can want it, and we can trust Him to change us.

When a person joins the Marines with long hair, rings in each ear, and an undisciplined life; the minute

he signs on the dotted line, he *is* a Marine. He is not a good one. That comes later. But he has committed to becoming a good Marine. The same is true of marriage. When we stand at an altar and say, “I do”, we do not know what we are getting into. But we have committed to becoming a good husband or wife. And my wife will tell you I am still working on it, just like I am still working on being all that God wants me to be.

The moment of salvation comes when we actually *commit* to Jesus our sins to forgive (faith) and our lives to control and change (repentance). We do this by prayer. The dying criminal hanging beside Jesus, prayed, and Jesus told him that very day he would be in heaven with Him. (Luke 23) The sinful tax collector in Jesus’ parable humbly cried, “Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.” (Luke 18) and Jesus said he went home right with God. The Bible says, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, will be saved.” (Romans 10)

And Jesus has given us an action to take after prayer. In the New Testament (Acts 2/16) and today, the way we let people know of our prayer and our commitment is to be baptized, which means to join a group of God’s people in some local church. Baptism does not save; it is just the first act of obedience to Christ in the Christian life.

#### **D. Caution**

“My Spirit will not always strive with man.” (Genesis 6)

“It is impossible to bring them again to repentance.” (Hebrews 6)

Six blackbirds were sitting on a fence and four decided to fly away. How many are left? The answer is 6. To decide is not to do. The old saying is right, “The road to hell is filled with good intentions.” The most tragic people at the Judgment will be those of you who “always meant” to get right with God but put it off until it was too late.

It is not right to believe you can get right “any time you want to.” This is because we do not always want to and the only reason you want to now is because God is working in you. But God, in Hebrews 6, says of some who turned away from the church, “It is impossible to bring them to repentance again.” (Hebrews 6:6)

As most of us look back, we see that we resisted this work of the Holy Spirit. We do this, usually by putting it off, with the idea that we can and probably will do it “later”. This is serious beyond our wildest imagination. The truth is we never truly “want to” become Christians, until the Spirit brings us to the crisis of decision.

I was under conviction only three times

in my life. The third time I made an excuse not to commit as I had done twice before. The preacher was giving an invitation to come forward and I wanted to go, but made up my mind again not to do it that morning. The feeling came over me that this was my last chance and if I didn't do it then, I would probably never do it. I don't know if that was true but I know now that the Bible says God's Spirit will not always wrestle with us and God says through Isaiah, "call upon the Lord *while He is near.*" (Isaiah 55:6)

It is not that God does not love us or want us to be His children. The Bible warns us not to "harden" our hearts (Hebrews 3:7-8). The term means "callous". We can say "No" to God so many times that His touch is no longer felt. An old hymn says,

There is a line by us unseen / That crosses every path  
The hidden boundary between / God's patience and His wrath.

Peter told the crowd at Pentecost, "Save yourselves / repent / and be baptized, and you will receive the Holy Spirit (new birth) and the forgiveness of sins." (Acts 2)

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