



An undenominational publication devoted to the teachings of Jesus and His apostles and dedicated to those who seek the truth.

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# CONFUSED ABOUT SALVATION?

If you are bewildered by conflicting voices of religious teachers with different messages about what you need to do to please God, you are not alone. There are so many different kinds of denominations, so many man-made traditions, so many distractions from various spiritual ideologies. Confusion is inevitable. There are people just like you in every part of our nation who would like to do what God expects of them, but don't know where to turn, who to listen to, who to trust.

Jesus addressed the spiritual confusions of His own time. He spoke of those who taught man-made traditions as if they were the words of God and warned His disciples not to follow them. He said: "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the pit." (Matthew 15:14) His most severe reprimands were for those who "shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces, for you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in." (Matthew 23:13)

It is comforting to know that in the midst of uncertainty, spiritual ignorance and pretentious leaders some things remain absolutely sure:

**1.** There is a God in heaven who loves you. He does not want you to be lead astray from His paths. He wants you to know what He expects.

**2.** God's truth is understandable. He promised: "If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32) It is not difficult to walk in His paths.

**3.** God wants you to know what sin is and to be forgiven of your sins so you can go to heaven. "He is not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) He wants you to get ready for your "final exam". (John 12:48)

**4.** To believe in Jesus Christ means to trust in Him, lean upon Him. That's more than believing a set of historical facts about Him; it's a personal commitment to give your live to Him in loving obedience. (John 3:16-36)

May these articles help in your spiritual journey. Pray for God to make His will clear to you. When you are ready, please get in touch with us!

— David Tarbet, Editor  
Church of Christ, New Milford, Connecticut

# REPENTANCE OR PENANCE WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?



**PENANCE** and **REPENTANCE** are two very different things.

**PENANCE** is making a sacrifice or doing something good in order to atone for bad decisions. An example would be someone who accidentally killed another person and tried to “make it up” to the family by paying them money. Such a person tries to make things right by *penalizing* himself.

There is a spiritual application for sinners who want to gain forgiveness of their sins. Some think they need to pay a penalty – to make their own lives miserable, to deprive themselves of innocent pleasures, in order to win God’s favor. Penance means trying to atone for wrongdoings — *earning* the forgiveness of God or the “church” by making his own life difficult, or donating money to a religious institution. The truth is that one cannot “pay” for his sins. Forgiveness can never be earned no matter how much we do! This is a clear teaching of the Scriptures. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

**REPENTANCE** is different. It means to “change.” It does not suppose that one can do enough good or

make enough sacrifices to wipe out one’s sins. Repentance means recognizing that one has done wrong, changing one’s mind to stop doing what is sinful and start doing what is right. Repentance is a change in behavior that arises from a change in the inner man.

Lactantius, an ancient Roman apologist, compared repentance to an animal that was fooled by a trap saying: “In short, even the dumb animals, when they are ensnared by fraud, if by any means they have extricated themselves so as to escape, become more cautious for the future, and always avoid all those things in which they have perceived wiles and snares. Thus repentance makes a man cautious and diligent to avoid the faults into which he has once fallen through deceit.”

Christian repentance is based on believing that God is right and conforming one’s life to the teachings of the Jesus. It is deciding to change one’s sinful habits, ungodly behavior and beliefs that are not in harmony with Bible teaching. Christians turn away from living sinfully because they know that is the only path that leads to eternal life.

— Nathaniel Hios  
Church of Christ, Kittery, Maine

# SAVED BY GRACE OR BY WORKS?

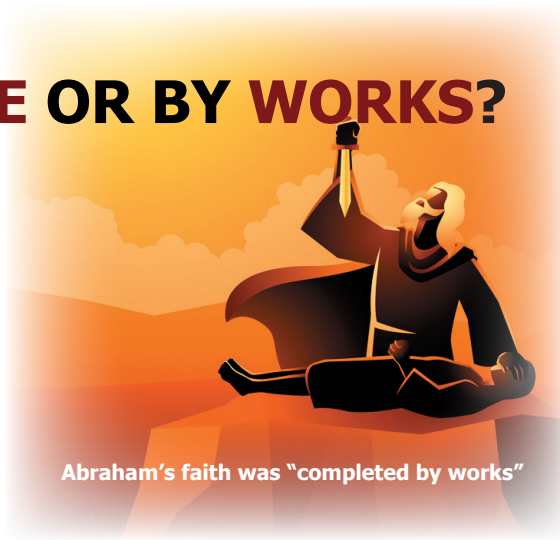
The answer to this question is “BOTH”. Let us begin by examining **Ephesians 2:8-10**. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

**Grace** is the free gift of God, in other words, grace is getting what we *need* instead of what we *deserve*. We deserve eternal death (separation from God), but we get eternal life through Jesus—God’s gift to the world. Everyone must accept God’s gift of Jesus in order to be saved eternally. Without God’s gift of grace, we would be dead in sin.

**Faith** is important if we are to receive grace. We are saved by grace “*through faith*”. The Bible says: “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

**Obedience** to Jesus is a necessary expression of faith, and its importance is not cancelled by grace. Faith that saves is faith that **obeys**. As scripture teaches: “Faith by itself, *if it does not have works, is dead.*” (James 2:17)

Works of *obedience* (not of merit or boasting!) are necessary to take full advantage of the “gift of God.”



Abraham’s faith was “completed by works”

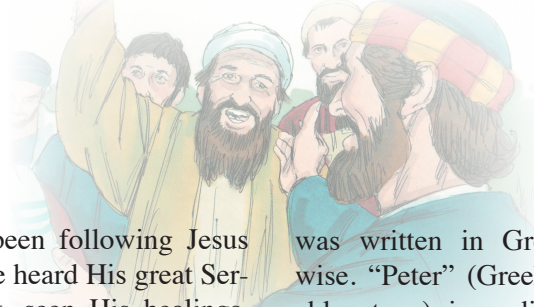
**Genesis 22:1-19**

“Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that *faith apart from works is useless*? Was not Abraham our father *justified by works* when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and *faith was completed by his works*; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’ — and he was called the friend of God. You see that a person is *justified by works and not by faith alone*. . . For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also *faith apart from works is dead.*” (James 2:21-26)

“They should repent and turn to God, *performing deeds* in keeping with their repentance.” (Acts 26:20b) The free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus when we believe that He is the Son of God, confess His name, repent of our sins, and are baptized for their forgiveness.

— Gary Babcock  
Kent County Church of Christ  
Coventry, Rhode Island

# SHOULD I CONFESS MY SINS OR CONFESS MY FAITH IN JESUS?



The apostles had been following Jesus long enough to have heard His great Sermon on the Mount, seen His healings, marvel at His parables, and participate in miraculously feeding 5000. As they followed Him to Caesarea Philippi Jesus knew it was time for them to process all these things and come to some conclusions about Him.

He asked them who the crowds thought He might be. They responded, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” (Matthew 16:14)

Then He asked the big question, “But who do you say that I am?” They had probably been thinking about it, but they needed to say it out loud; their private faith needed a public expression. Peter confessed for all the apostles, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** (Matthew 16:16)

Jesus was pleased and responded, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...” (Matthew 16:17, 18).

Some have mistakenly taught that Peter is the rock upon which the church is built, but Greek grammar (the New Testament

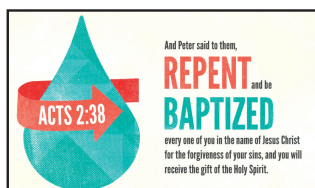
was written in Greek) insists otherwise. “Peter” (Greek: *petros*, a throwable stone) is a different word from the “rock” (Greek: *petras*, bedrock) on which the church is built. The rock is not Peter, but is instead the **confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ** which Peter made. And for the last 20 centuries, faith and confession have been the foundation both of salvation in Christ and of His church.

Now, some have mistakenly thought that confession to be saved refers to some public confession of our personal sins. It does not. The inspired apostle Paul clears this up in Romans 10:9, 10, “...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.” When the Bible talks about confession as a part of salvation, it doesn’t mean confession of sin, rather it means a *confession of faith in Jesus*.

Who do you say Jesus is? If you believe He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, are you willing to publicly express that faith? Jesus said, “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32)

— Park Linscomb  
Church of Christ, Manchester  
New Hampshire

# WILL I BE SAVED **BEFORE** BAPTISM OR **WHEN** I AM BAPTIZED ?



“It is time,” God said. “The fulfillment of the ages has come, My Son is born of a woman and born under the law.” (Galatians 4:4) “In thirty-three years He will be on a cross as a sacrifice for My creation. Some will believe in Him and some will not.”

Thirty-three years later the story broke on the day of Pentecost. Peter was speaking for God to those gathered in Jerusalem. He spoke of who Jesus was and those who killed Him, the ones gathered in front of him. Their response was immediate; they were cut to the heart and demanded, “What must we do?”

Peter’s response to “what must we do” is the hub of the Bible. Acts chapter 2 and verse 38 reveals God’s relationship with all of us, He provides a way for us to get to Him, to start over with Him. Peter’s response to “what must we do” was not a discussion about “lets figure this out,” or “lets think about it,” it was God’s response that forgiveness is present and you can turn away from all the guilt, the pain, the failures. You can start over!

Peter was very direct. He said: “repent” (turn your life completely around) and be baptized (immersed) for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Not only will you be forgiven but the Holy Spirit will come to live within you as the guarantee of this promise of forgiveness.

Three thousand were baptized (immersed) that day in Jerusalem. They did not question what God said through Peter. They repented of their sins and were immediately baptized “for the forgiveness of their sins” and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Acts 2:38 way is the only way. Three thousand were forgiven on that Pentecost because they repented and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. They were not baptized thinking their sins had already been forgiven, but in anticipation that their sins would be forgiven when they were baptized.

Baptism is the acceptance of the life God offers which is His forgiveness and His Spirit dwelling within us. His appeal is do what He commands in the way He commands. Forgiveness happens when we are baptized.

— Michael Hammonds  
Church of Christ, Natick, Massachusetts

# IS BAPTISM BY SPRINKLING OR IMMERSION?

The Bible is called the “handbook” for life. Instructions are given in three primary forms: (1) direct commands, (2) implied necessity, and (3) divine examples. Baptism is taught in all three ways!

Baptism is a direct command. Jesus our Lord and Savior said: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16)

Baptism is an implied necessity. The epistles of the New Testament were written to those who had been baptized. “And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes.” (Galatians 3:27 New Living Translation) The apostle Paul also wrote: “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. (Romans 6:3-4) This confirms the connection of immersion and unification with Christ, and hence the new life as followers of Christ.

Finally, there are divine examples. When Jesus was baptized by John

the Baptist, he was at the Jordan River because “water was plentiful there” (John 3:23). The Jordan River provided enough water to immerse, totally submerge in water.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, and the Greek word for “baptism” is:

*baptízō* – properly, “submerge”; hence, baptize, to immerse (literally, “dip under”). 907 (*baptízō*) implies submersion (“immersion”), in contrast to 472 *antéxomai* (“sprinkle”).

(Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance)

Sprinkling water in connection with baptism is not taught in the Scriptures. The clear example of the action of immersion is the story of the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip the evangelist. After teaching Jesus from the prophet Isaiah, the Ethiopian asked: “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both “*went down into*” the water, and Philip “*baptized*” (immersed) him.” Then they “*came up out of*” the water, rejoicing in assurance that his sins were forgiven. (Acts 8:34-39)

— Johnny Davis  
Church of Christ, S. Burlington, Vermont

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