

WHAT SHALL WE DO? (Acts 2:37)

Let us consider this question carefully for it involves salvation.

It was asked to Peter on the Day of Pentecost by those who had crucified Jesus.

Some would say that salvation doesn't involve doing anything, just believing.

That's not what Peter said!

Here is some background. Jesus promised His apostles that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them (Acts 1:8). When the day of Pentecost had fully come the Holy Spirit came upon them just as Jesus had promised (Acts 2). One manifestation of the Spirit was speaking in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. This miracle drew a crowd for there were devout Jews in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven. Miraculously however, each person understood what was being said in their own native language.

That's when Peter stood up and preached the first Gospel sermon. After convincing them that this miraculous experience was a fulfillment of prophecy, he then convinced them that Jesus, whom they had crucified, had been raised from the dead. Further, Peter insisted that God had exalted this same Jesus to His right hand and made Him both Lord and Christ.

“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do’?” (Acts 2:37).

- Please pay close attention!
- Listen carefully to what Peter said to “do”!
- Peter was not speaking on his own for Jesus gave him the keys of the Kingdom. Whatever Peter bound on earth would also be bound in heaven (Matt. 16:19).
- Jesus further promised that the “Spirit of truth” would guide the apostles in “all truth” (Jn. 16:12).
- Note that Peter did not tell them to believe. The fact that they were “cut to the heart” indicates that they already believed.
- Neither did Peter tell them to confess, though we will later learn that **“it is with your heart you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Rom. 10:10).**
- Confession is obviously something that needs to be “done”. On this occasion, however, Peter didn't mention confession though we can logically assume they did believe in their heart and confess with their mouth that Jesus Christ was Lord.
- Here is what Peter told them to “do”.

“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).

- Peter, by inspiration, promised that if they would “do” two things, God would “do” two things.
- That is, if they would “repent and be baptized”, God would “forgive their sins” and give them the “gift of the Holy Spirit”.

- Repentance is important for Jesus had already commanded that **“repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk. 24:47).**
- Baptism is important for it is the only commandment in the Bible given in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

DOES THIS MEAN THAT THE PEOPLE AT PENTECOST WERE SAVED BY WORKS?

ABSOLUTELY NOT! “For it is by grace you are saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8,9).

We cannot earn salvation, it is a gift! When we obey Jesus we are not earning anything. Jesus said this about obedience: **“So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’” (Lk. 17:10).** Those who repented and were baptized did not earn salvation, they were “unworthy servants” who only did their duty. Let’s keep it simple! Those who want Jesus to be their Lord obviously “do” what He says to “do”!

This is precisely what happened: **“Those that gladly accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41).**

- Note that they “gladly” accepted his message!
- Do not be surprised by this!
- It does make you “glad” when you “do” what God commands you to “do”.
- The commandments of God are not burdensome (1 Jn. 5:3).
- It is never wrong to obey God.
- There is nothing wrong with bowing your head, closing your eyes, raising your hand, coming forward, and repeating the sinners prayer. That’s just not what Peter told them to “do”.

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL OF TARSUS

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is well known. In fact, it is recorded three times in the book of Acts (Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-16; 26:4-18). As you know Saul’s name was later changed to Paul (Acts 13:9). It was Paul himself who insisted that “works” have nothing to do with our salvation (Eph. 2:8-10).

As you know, God does not show favoritism (Acts 10:34). Everyone on earth is saved in the same way. It doesn’t matter whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, everyone is saved in identically the same way. God does not show favoritism!

Therefore Paul also had to “do” something, just like the sinners “did” at Pentecost.

- In two of the three accounts of Saul’s conversion Jesus Himself specifically told him he had to “do” something!
- Jesus, however, did not tell him what to do. Jesus gave this privilege to a man named Ananias. This is exciting! God has ordained that mankind will be saved by preaching (1 Cor. 1:21).
 - Jesus did not preach at Pentecost, He allowed Peter to do that (Acts 2:14).
 - Jesus did not preach in Macedonia, He allowed Paul to do that (Acts 16:10).

- Jesus allows sinful people like you and me to tell sinners what they must “do” in order to be saved.
- We are laborers together with God. One man plants, another man waters, but it is God Who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:5-9).
- Note! In the first account of Saul’s conversion Jesus said to him: **“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do” (Acts 9:6).**
- In the second account Saul said: **“What shall I do, Lord? I asked. ‘Get up’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do” (Acts 22:10).**
- In the third account Saul told King Agrippa **“I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven” (Acts 26:19).** In all three accounts Saul “did” something!
- You can’t go wrong doing what Jesus tells you to do. There is only one command in the Bible given by Mary the mother of Jesus. It is found in John chapter 2 regarding a wedding in Cana of Galilee. When they ran out of wine the mother of Jesus said to the servants at the wedding: **“Do whatever He tells you” (Jn. 2:5).** They merely “did” what Jesus told them to “do” and the problem was solved. How simple! How profound!
- This is good advice for everyone for the words that Jesus spoke will judge us in the last day (Jn. 12:48)
- It is difficult to imagine that anyone can be saved who deliberately disobeys Jesus. Disobeying Jesus is like building a house on sand and will lead to eternal ruin (Matt. 7:24-27).
- Why would anybody call Jesus Lord and not do what He commands? (Lk. 6:46)

Since the conversion of Saul is given such prominence let us examine it more closely.

- Saul was on his way to Damascus with letters of authority to persecute believers (Acts 9:1,2).
- At about noon Saul saw a light from heaven that was brighter than the sun (Acts 26:13).
- Saul fell to the ground (Acts 9:4).
- Jesus spoke to him from heaven and said: **“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4)**
- Saul obviously believed in Jesus, that’s why he obeyed Him.
- Jesus commanded him to go into Damascus and he would be told what he had to “do” (Acts 9:6).
- Saul was blinded by the experience and had to be led by the hand into the city (Acts 9:8).
- For three days he could not see and did not eat or drink (Acts 9:9).
- Then God sent a man named Ananias to heal Saul of his blindness (Acts 9:10-19).
- It was Ananias who told Saul what to “do”. He said: **“And now, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16).** It is remarkable that three days after seeing Jesus, after three days of fasting and prayer, and even after being healed of blindness, Saul still had his sins.
- Note! Saul was not commanded to repent for his actions proved he had already repented.
- Great is the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16). Please ponder these inspired words of Paul to Titus: **“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5).**
- Jesus taught us to pray for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). In heaven the will of God is done immediately. That’s also the way it should be done on earth!

- Saul immediately “did” what he was commanded to “do”.
- So should we!

CHRISTIANITY IS LIKE A MARRIAGE

Many wrongly assume that we are saved by works. They suggest that when we die God will weigh our good deeds against our bad. If the good outweighs the bad then we are saved. If the bad outweighs the good then we are lost. This is absolutely wrong! The Bible does not teach this at all!

Christianity is unique among all the religions of the world in that it is like a marriage. The Scriptures have much to say on this subject. When Paul gave instructions to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:21-33, for example, he explained: **“This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32)**. John the Baptist also described Jesus as the “Bridegroom” (Jn. 3:27-30). The new Jerusalem will someday come down out of heaven like a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2). An angel said to John: **“Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9)**. It is clear from the Bible that our relationship with Jesus is like that of a Bridegroom and a bride.

Note that the marriage commitment comes at the beginning of our relationship and not at the end. No bride has to wait until the end of her life to get married. No bride has to demonstrate by years of faithful work that she is worthy of her husband’s love. Certainly Jesus does wait to see how good we are before He loves us. In fact, Christ died for us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8). As we have already pointed out, when Peter preached the Gospel on the Day of Pentecost, ON THAT VERY DAY about 3,000 souls were added to their number (Acts 2:41). No one has to wait in order to be saved!

It really doesn’t take long to repent and be baptized!

Jesus once likened the kingdom of heaven to 10 virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). 5 were wise, and 5 were foolish. The wise virgins “did” something to get prepared, and the foolish virgins did nothing.

Immediately after telling this parable Jesus told the parable of the talents. In this parable the men who did something were rewarded and the man who did nothing was condemned as wicked and lazy (Matt. 25:14-30).

It is fundamental that **“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6)**.

Earnestly seeking God obviously involves “doing” what He commands you to “do”!

LISTEN TO JESUS NOT MOSES

- Peter, James, and John were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36).
- Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared with glorious splendor and talked with Jesus about His death which was about to happen in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31).

- Peter was greatly impressed and said to Jesus: **“Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ He did not know what he was saying” (Lk. 9:33).**
- **“While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they enter the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, ‘THIS IS MY SON, WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; LISTEN TO HIM!’” (Lk. 9:34,35).**
- Moses and Elijah cannot save you. Only Jesus can do that!
- Therefore let us listen to Jesus and He will explain Moses and Elijah!
- Moses will actually accuse those who trust in him. Jesus said: **“Do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses on whom your hopes are set” (Jn. 5:45).**
- Paul wrote: **“We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:15-16).**
- When the Scriptures teach that we are not saved by “works” it is invariably referring to works of the Law that was given by Moses.
- Because we believe in Jesus we listen to Him for He explains the Law and the Prophets.
- Because we believe in Jesus we also “do” whatever He tells us to “do”.

THE FAITH CHAPTER

This article is about “What shall we do?” Doing something, of course, does not replace faith it demonstrates it. Hebrews chapter 11 is known as the “faith chapter” of the Bible. Note that the heroes and heroines mentioned in this chapter “did” something to demonstrate their faith:

- By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain (v. 4).
- By faith Enoch pleased God (v. 5).
- By faith Noah built an ark to save his family (v. 7).
- By faith Abraham obeyed God and went out not knowing where he was going (v. 8).
- By faith Abraham offered Isaac (v. 17).
- By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau (v. 20).
- By faith Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph (v. 21).
- By faith Joseph gave instructions about his bones (v. 22).
- By faith Moses’ parents hid him (v. 23).
- By faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter (v. 24).
- Etc.

Yes! By faith the walls of Jericho came down (v. 30). This would not have happened, however, if Joshua had not “done” something. Joshua did not just believe, he also obeyed (Josh. 6:1-21). Even though the walls came down “by faith”, here are some the things that Joshua and the army of Israel actually “did”. In obedience to the commander of the Lord’s army:

- They marched around the city once a day for six days.
- Seven priests carrying ram’s horns marched in front of the ark.
- Nobody said a word until Joshua told them to.
- On the seventh day they marched around Jericho seven times with the priests blowing on their trumpets.
- When the priests sounded a long blast on the trumpets all the people gave a loud shout.

- Then the walls of Jericho came tumbling down.
- Then the army of Israel went straight in and conquered the city.
- Would the walls have come down if Joshua had not “done” what he was commanded to “do”?

Or consider the example of the prostitute Rahab. “By faith” she welcomed the spies (v. 31). Here are some of the other things she had to “do” in order to be saved (Josh. 2:17-20).

- She had to tie the scarlet cord in the window.
- She had to bring all of her family members inside of her house.
- Anyone who left the house would die.
- If she told anyone about this agreement the spies were released from their oath.
- “Doing” what she was told to “do” did not negate her faith, it demonstrated it!

James said it like this: **“Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do” (Ja. 2:19).**

OBEYING GOD IS NOT A REASON TO BOAST

- God is a jealous God! He will not give His glory to another (Is. 42:8).
- Any altar with dressed stones shaped by a tool of man, for example, was defiled (Ex. 20:25). When we worship God nothing is to detract our focus from Him to anything that man has done!
- One reason we are not justified by works is so that no man can boast (Eph. 2:9).
- In fact, boasting is excluded by the law of faith (Rom. 3:27).
- As we have said, however, obedience does not detract from God, it glorifies Him!

Here are a few examples of obedience to consider:

- Elisha, as you know, had a double portion of the spirit of Elijah (2 Ki. 2:9, 10). He quite frequently did something to release the power of God. For example, Elisha healed bad water by doing something. He called for a new bowl, put salt in it, and threw the salt into the poison spring. When the water was purified Elisha did not boast. He knew that it was God Who had healed the water (2 Ki. 2:19-22).
- Elisha also helped the widow of a prophet pay her bills by “doing” something. All she had was a little oil and no money. Elisha told her to borrow many empty jars, then pour her little bit of oil into the jars. When she obeyed all the jars were filled and she was able to sell the oil and pay her bills. Obviously she did not boast about this for she knew that God had miraculously multiplied the vessels of oil (2 Ki. 4:1-7).
- Naaman the leper was told by Elisha to wash seven times in the Jordan River. When he obeyed he was healed. His obedience did not in any way cause him to boast. Quite the contrary. His healing convinced him that Jehovah was the true God. Naaman said: **“Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel” (2 Ki. 5:15).**
- Jesus once spat on the ground, made some mud, and put it on the eyes of a man who was born blind. Jesus then commanded him to go and “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (Jn. 9:7). When the blind man obeyed he was healed. This man did not boast about what he had done for he knew his healing was a miracle from God. He merely washed in the Pool of Siloam but he knew it was Jesus who had healed him.

- God commanded Moses to stretch out his staff over the sea. When he did the waters parted (Ex. 14:16). When the people of God were safely across the sea God told Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea and the waters would flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots (Ex. 14:26). Moses “did” what God said to “do”. He obeyed God! Israel was saved and the Egyptians were destroyed. Moses knew, however, that what he “did” was nothing to boast about. That’s why he composed a song giving all the glory to God (Ex. 15:1-21).
- In heaven we will also be singing the “Song of Moses” (Rev. 15:3,4). **THERE WILL BE NO BOASTING IN HEAVEN FOR ALL THE GLORY FOR OUR SALVATION BELONGS TO GOD!**

THE MIRACLE OF SALVATION

When Paul told the Corinthians about the miracle of salvation he quoted Isaiah: **“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” - BUT GOD HAS REVEALED IT TO US BY HIS SPIRIT. THE SPIRIT SEARCHES ALL THINGS, EVEN THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD” (1 Cor. 2:9,10).**

The last part of this passage has been capitalized to emphasize that the text is not primarily speaking about heaven. It is describing the great salvation we are experiencing now! Heaven will be wonderful, but what we are experiencing “now” is something so wonderful that it never entered into the heart of man.

- This glorious Gospel was hidden in times past but has now been revealed to the saints (Col. 1:26).
- The prophets searched and inquired diligently to understand the Gospel but were not able. Even the angels longed to look into these things (1 Pet. 1:10-12).
- While this glorious Gospel was not made known in other generations, it is now revealed unto us by God’s holy apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:5).
- The miracle of salvation is so wonderful that nobody ever dreamed it was possible.
- While salvation can be fully experienced, it is so wonderful that it cannot be fully explained.
- Salvation is like the intimacy of the marriage union. You cannot explain it to anyone. It has to be experienced.
- Let us never be guilty of reducing this glorious Gospel to a partisan debate. No matter what we say or do only God can add anyone to the Body of Christ!
- We should never “do” anything that would detract from the glory that belongs to God alone!

Let us return to the question asked at Pentecost. It is indeed worthy of our consideration. They wanted to know what to “do” and so should we. If God commands us to **“Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10)** then that is precisely what we should “do”. We can be absolutely confident that it is always safe to “do” what God commands us to “do”!

The wisest man in the world once said: **“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working, nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom” (Eccl. 9:10).**

The point is, when we die it is too late to “do” anything!

Therefore what Christ commands you to “do”, “do it now” for today is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2).

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