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What Must I Do to Become a Christian?

by Bill Lockwood

The New Testament plainly teaches that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and bodily or physically rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-4, et al). Provision was thereby made for sinful man to be reconciled to God through the blood of Christ. This provision was made for *the entire world* (Titus 2:11-12; 1 John 2:1-2). However, not all the world will be saved. This is because men and women have a responsibility to appropriate—not earn—the benefits of Jesus' death to themselves. In response to gospel preaching, multitudes in the book of Acts responded, "What must we DO to be saved?" (Acts 2:37). Saul, on the road to Damascus, was told, "Go into the city and it shall be told you what you MUST DO." What does the Bible say in this regard?

1. We must **hear** the gospel. Faith comes by "hearing" the Word of God (Romans 10:17). But this hearing does not merely involve the physical sensation of registering sound waves. It refers to having a *receptive heart*. "If any man wills to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself" said Christ (John 7:17).
2. We must **believe** the gospel. "Except you believe that I am He you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). A common error however, appears just here. Many suppose that it is at the "point of faith" or by "faith only" that one is saved. This the Bible does not teach. "You see that by *works* a man is justified, and **not by faith only**" (James 2:24). The apostle John wrote, "As many as *received him*, to them gave He the right to *become* children of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). One cannot become what he already is! Believers have the right to become children of God.
3. We must **repent** of our sins. Jesus commended, "except you repent, you shall all ... perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). No repentance—no salvation. Repentance involves a change of disposition toward wickedness and a resolve to forsake ungodliness. This is the key that leads to transformed habits.
4. We must **be baptized** in water. Upon one's confession that he believes that Jesus is the Christ, baptism in water is commanded by the Lord in order to obtain "forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2:38). Does this earn salvation, as some popularly suppose? Absolutely not! Just as the blind man who washed his eyes in the pool of Siloam (see John 9) and "came seeing," so baptism is simply to comply with the commands of Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, in Titus 3:5 Paul speaks of our salvation this way, "not by works done in righteousness *which we have done ourselves*, but according to his mercy he saved us,

through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” What is “washing of regeneration?” That is a plain reference to baptism in water (Ephesians 5:26; 1 Peter 3:21). Thus, Paul says we are saved by the mercy of God “not by works which we have done ourselves” but by baptism! Is it baptism alone? No. It is by receptive hearing, faith, repentance, and baptism that we are saved and become a New Testament Christian. There is no other way.