

## Essay: The Only Required Condition For Acquiring Salvation (NIV based)

### INTRODUCTION:

Within evangelical circles today, there are many people who hold that faith alone is not sufficient for salvation. Some people contend that baptism, or repentance, or confessing Christ, or surrender to God, or prayer must be linked to faith as a condition to achieve salvation at the time of conversion. These conditions, along with related concepts and terms, will be examined to determine their validity as to whether they are truly requirements to faith for salvation.

### DEFINITION OF SALVATION:

'Salvation' can be described as the gracious action of God by which He grants a human deliverance from being condemned to eternally suffering the punishment for every sin that person has committed in this life (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). The Word of God pronounces in Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God", meaning that because of the sins that each of us humans commit, we fall short of satisfying the uncompromisable requirement of God that we must possess the condition of being absolutely perfect without sin during our entire life on this earth in order to enter heaven. Within the granting of salvation, God extends to the "qualified" person complete "forgiveness" of every sin the person commits during his/her life, and He legally and judicially transfers his/her membership from being in "the dominion of darkness" and brings him/her into membership in "the kingdom of the Son" (Colossians 1:12-14). So at the moment that salvation is granted, the person's eternal destiny diametrically changes from heading towards eternal punishment in hell, to being locked into heading towards eternal life in heaven with God.

### DEFINITION OF FAITH:

The element that God requires in order to acquire salvation is 'faith'. In the Old Testament, faith means "to lean upon" or "confidently resting upon" and does not imply merely intellectual belief as much as it indicates trust and commitment (Erickson p.939). In the New Testament, faith refers to "believing what someone says, to accept a statement as true" (p.939). Thus, faith involves "both believing that and believing in, or assenting to facts and trusting in a person" (pp.940-941).

The faith that God requires for acquiring salvation is very specific. Faith in God is not sufficient for acquiring salvation, nor is faith that Jesus lived and fell victim to dying on the cross. The faith that God requires for acquiring salvation involves an informed decision applied personally. A person qualifies to receive salvation when he/she hears and understands and believes and trusts in and applies to himself/herself the 'gospel' message from the Scriptures, therein establishing his/her faith in Christ Jesus as the Son of God, who being perfect without sin, suffered and died on the cross and rose from the dead on the third day, thereby effectively paying the punishment for his/her own sins so that he/she will have eternal life in heaven (Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). So, the faith that God requires for acquiring salvation is specifically faith and trusting in God that He sent Jesus to suffer and pay the punishment on the cross, through which there is forgiveness for one's own sins that results in eternal life in heaven (1 Peter 1:21; Acts 4:12). Having faith and trusting in one's own goodness, or religiousness, or anything else to acquire salvation and/or to get into heaven is contrary to and oppositional to this specific faith that God requires and only accepts.

## KEY PASSAGES:

There are numerous passages in the Scriptures that distinctly state that this faith is required to receive God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. The following is a list of some of these passages: Matthew 18:6; John 1:12; 2:11,23; 3:15,16,18; Acts 10:43; 16:31; Romans 1:16-17; 3:22,25; 4:3; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 1:8-9; and 1 John 5:10,13. It is crucial to note that all of these passages do not contain any other requirement or condition on man's part for salvation.

## GOD'S ONLY CONDITION FOR SALVATION:

Obviously from these and other passages, this faith (as defined above) is the basis and only condition for salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9, for example, clearly and emphatically states that "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast". Unquestionably, these verses proclaim that human's best efforts to achieve salvation by adding to or replacing this faith do not satisfy the requirement of God for salvation.

## BELIEVE AND BE BAPTIZED:

Undoubtedly, there are countless numbers of people today who assert that faith alone is insufficient to achieve salvation. One of their most common beliefs is that baptism is required as a "means by which God imparts saving grace to accomplish the remission of sins" and they cite several passages to reinforce their beliefs (Erickson p.1090).

One passage they cite is Romans 6:1-11 in which they claim that baptism "actually unites us with Christ" (Erickson p.1091). However, the context of this passage implies that through baptism, the believer is identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (E. James p.6/4). John 3:5 is also cited but there is no clear indication that the phrase "born of water" refers to water baptism (Erickson p.1098). Another key verse for those who hold baptism as a condition of salvation is Mark 16:16. However, it must be noted that in the second half of that verse, baptism is not mentioned or linked to faith and that it is the "absence of belief, not of baptism, which is correlated with condemnation" (p.1098). Other verses that are cited are 1 Peter 3:21, Acts 2:38, and 16:33, but close examination of their immediate contexts reveal that baptism is not stated as a condition for salvation (p.1099). Therefore, it can be concluded that "baptism is not indispensable to salvation, rather that baptism may be an expression or a consequence of conversion - an act of faith and a testimony that one has been united with Christ in His death and resurrection, that one has experienced spiritual circumcision" (pp.1099,1101). This conclusion likewise applies to other ceremonies, such as taking communion, coming forward to an altar call, shaking the hand of the pastor, having someone lay hands on you, going to confession, going to mass, going to confirmation, becoming a member of a church, giving tithes, and etc.

## REPENT AND BELIEVE:

Another line of thinking asserts that 'salvation' necessarily involves both "the act of turning from one's sin in repentance and turning to Christ in faith" (Erickson p.933). According to this line of thinking, salvation must be comprised of both repentance and faith, which are distinguishable but inseparable (p.934). Repentance is the negative aspect of salvation and describes "the unbeliever's turning away from sin" (p.934). Faith is the positive aspect of salvation and expresses the unbeliever's turning toward Christ and "laying hold upon the promises and the work of Christ" (p.934). Both repentance and

faith are "incomplete without the other and each is motivated by the other" (p.934). Essentially, becoming aware of sin and turning from it brings the realization of the need to turn to Christ for the provision of His forgiveness and righteousness (p.934). And conversely in the same way, believing in Christ brings awareness of one's sin, which leads to repentance (p.934).

Even though repentance may naturally precede or accompany or facilitate salvation (2 Corinthians 7:10), the fact is that there are no verses in Scriptures in which repentance is stated as always being a required element for salvation to be granted by God. For some people, perhaps those who are deeply immersed in sin like the "chief priests and elders" of Judaism in Matthew 21:23-32 or the people who participated in crucifying Jesus in Acts 3:1-20, repentance may first be necessary for them in order for them to be willing to listen and consider changing their way of living, their beliefs, and the direction they are pursuing in their life that the gospel message of salvation contains, presents, and promotes. Another situation in which repentance may necessarily need to precede salvation is if the person has heard the gospel message of salvation and has seen credible substantial evidence that supports the validity of the gospel message of salvation, but has been deliberately rejecting and refusing to acknowledge the truth of the evidence, like in Mark 1:4-15 with Luke 4:14-15. Repentance may be necessary in order for some people in some situations to proceed towards salvation, but it is not technically required by God for everyone to acquire salvation.

#### BELIEVE AND CONFESS CHRIST:

Some evangelical Christians hold that in order to be valid for salvation, faith must be accompanied by a verbal confession of Christ. The verbal confession means "to declare, avow, profess, or proclaim" Christ as one's Savior (Johnson (Vol. 2) p.60). The basis for this determination seems to be based upon Romans 10:9-10 - "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.". Upon consideration of the clarity of these verses, it is obvious that God approves of this process of believe-and-confess as an appropriate means of conversion. However, it seems plausible that God allows but does not require the addition of confessing Christ to faith for salvation. This seems to be verified by the fact that there are very few (if any) other verses in Scriptures that substantiate the condition of verbally confessing Christ, while there is substantial Scriptural support for faith alone for salvation. Leading theologians appear to agree because a search of their writings reveals a lack of opposition to believe-and-confess Christ, yet a definite emphasis on faith alone for salvation. For example, author Charles C. Ryrie states that "confession of Jesus as God and thus faith in the God-Man saves from sin" (p.175). Likewise, author Alan F. Johnson comments that "what the heart believes will be uttered by the lips" (p.60). Yet, both of these authors firmly hold to faith alone for salvation (Ryrie p.172; Johnson (Vol.1) p.63).

#### BELIEVE AND SURRENDER TO GOD:

Another belief held by some evangelical Christians is that "there must at the time of salvation also be a moment of complete and unreserved willingness to commit one's life absolutely to the Lord even though the practice of a committed life may not follow completely" (Ryrie p.170). This view that faith must be linked with 'surrender to God' seems to be based on the same verses as the believe-and-confess view - namely Romans 10:9-10. But, here the emphasis is on the concept of Jesus as Lord.

Again, there seems to be divine approval for adding to faith the concept of 'surrender to God' - but only as an enhancement added to salvation, not as a technical requirement for salvation. Leading theological authors seem to support this as well, for author Charles C. Ryrie lists examples in Acts 19:18-19 and 2 Peter 2:7-8 which show in the lives of believers an "unwillingness at the time of salvation" and a "lifelong disobedience and rejection of the sovereignty of God" (p.173).

#### BELIEVE AND PRAY:

The condition that 'prayer must accompany faith in order to acquire salvation' appears also to fall under the same criterion that God approves of prayer as an additional reinforcing activity that the person engages in at the time of committing to faith for salvation, but God does not require it as a condition for salvation. The major passage here is Romans 10:13, "for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."". This seems to be a rock-solid proof text supporting the believe-and-pray condition for salvation but this concept also lacks adequate Scriptural support to prevail over faith alone for salvation. Again, theological authors support faith alone over believe-and-pray. Author Edgar C. James points out that the emphasis of Romans 10:13 in its context is on the availability of salvation for everyone - both Jew and Gentile (8/8, 4/3).

#### CLOSURE:

Upon examination of the terms and issues surrounding the controversies over whether faith alone is sufficient for salvation, it has been shown here that the activities of baptism, repentance, confessing Christ, surrender to God, and prayer are divinely approved as additions to but not requirements of salvation by faith alone. Hopefully, the study of these doctrinal issues has clarified what Biblical views evangelical Christians should hold, and thereby promote unity and oneness of mind and purpose.

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