

What Must I Do to be Saved?

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Introduction

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." The Bible speaks so often about the awesome and wonderful grace of God. Paul said in Romans 3:23-24 that even though we have all sinned, we can be "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Truly God's gift of salvation is a most wonderful thing. The Bible does indeed say we're saved by grace, but does it say we're saved by grace only? Or is there something we must do to inherit salvation?

Not Saved by Grace Only

If we were saved by grace only, then all would be saved because God's grace has been offered to all. Remember that John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." Titus 2:11 says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." 1 John 2:2 says, "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

But not all are saved; in fact, according to Matthew 7:13-14, most will not be saved. The Bible says that God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 2:9), but it also says that He will indeed punish sinners for all eternity. So, grace is offered to all, but not all are saved. That means, therefore, we must do something in order to be saved, something to place us in a position to receive that gift of salvation.

Belief Necessary to Receive Grace

One of the things we must do to receive God's grace is believe. In fact, belief in Jesus as the Son of God and our Savior is the very foundation of our salvation. The focus of the entire Bible is upon Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Acts 4:12 says that there is salvation in no other name.

Consider John 1:10-12: "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." So many did not and would not accept Jesus as the Son of God. But for those who would accept Him and believe in Him, they were given the right to become God's children. The passage does not say that belief made one a child of God, but it is the foundation of becoming a child of God. As the verse says, "To them He gave the right to become children of God." Faith is where it begins, for "Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6)."

Several other verses in the NT speak about belief and salvation: Mark 16:16; Mark 1:14-15; John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47, 53-58; 7:38; 11:25-26; 17:3; 20:31; Acts 4:4; 13:48; 16:31; 26:18; Romans 1:16; 3:26; Galatians 2:16; 1 John 5:4-5, 13. (It ought not be surprising to find such an emphasis on belief in the writings of the NT; the context of that time was a world that did NOT believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah.) We are saved by grace, but first of all, it is through faith. Believing in Jesus is something we must do if we are to receive the gift of grace and be saved.

Is Belief Enough?

No. It is the foundation of being saved, but it is not, in and of itself, a guarantee of a saved condition. The Bible speaks of many who believed in Jesus but were obviously not saved. In John 12:42, the Bible says, "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue."

Saving faith, or the proper kind of belief, is more than just a mental assertion or acknowledgment of Jesus. James 2:19 says "The demons also believe, and shudder," but surely they are not saved. James 2:20, 24 says, "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone." James here speaks, not of meritorious works that would earn salvation, but rather of works of obedience. In other words, the right kind of faith, the kind of faith that saves, is the kind that makes a real difference in the life of the one who believes. Although works themselves do not merit salvation, saving faith will be evidenced by good works.

Many Actions That Save

As important as belief is, it is not the only action mentioned in Scripture in connection with salvation. There are actually several actions mentioned in the NT which, while not all are necessarily a prerequisite to a saved condition, are specifically said to result in justification, salvation, and/or eternal life:

- Believing in Jesus (Mark 16:16; Mark 1:14-15; John 1:12; 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47, 53-58; 7:38; 11:25-26; 17:3; 20:31; Acts 4:4; 13:48; 16:31; 26:18; Romans 1:16; 3:26; 10:9; Galatians 2:16; 1 John 5:4-5, 13)
- Following Jesus (John 10:9-10, 27-28)
- Calling upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13)
- Being in Christ (1 John 5:11-12)
- Confessing belief in Jesus (Matt 10:32; Luke 12:8; Romans 10:9)
- Converting and be like children (Matt 18:3; Mark 10:14)
- Repenting (Mark 1:14-15; Acts 11:18; 2 Corinthians 7:10)
- Being baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38-47; 10:48 w/11:14; Romans 6:5)
- Being born again (John 3:3-7)
- Obeying God (Acts 5:32; Philippians 2:12; Hebrews 5:9)
- Being enslaved to God (Romans 6:22)
- Drawing near to God (Hebrews 7:25)
- Continually putting to death sin (Romans 8:13)
- Being more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 5:20)
- Forgiving others (Matt 6:14-15; Luke 6:37)
- Doing the will of the Father (Matt 7:21; 12:50; Mark 3:35; Luke 8:21)
- Having compassion and brotherly love (Matt 9:13; 10:42)
- Giving up things that would come before God (Matt 19:29; Mark 10:29-30; Luke 18:29-30; John 12:25)
- Caring for those in need (Matt 25:34-40)
- Doing good deeds (John 5:29; Romans 2:10)
- Keeping Jesus' word and commandments (John 8:51; 12:49-50; 14:23; 15:10)
- Enduring to the end (Mark 13:13)
- Continuing in the faith (Colossians 1:22-23)
- Perseverance in doing good (Romans 2:7)
- Saved by Grace (Ephesians 2:5; Titus 2:11)
- Saved by Faith (Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 3:7-11; 2 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 1:9)
- Saved by Baptism (1 Peter 3:21)
- Saved by Hope (Romans 8:24)
- Saved by Confession (Romans 10:9)

- Saved by Calling on the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13; Acts 2:21)
- Saved by Loving the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10)
- Saved by Persevering in inspired teaching (1 Corinthians 15:2; 1 Timothy 4:16)
- Saved by Mercy (Titus 3:5)
- Saved by the word being implanted (James 1:21)

Many Actions That Condemn

Likewise, the NT mentions numerous actions which prevent salvation and therefore result in condemnation:

- Refusing to believe in Jesus (Mark 16:16; Luke 19:10-12; John 8:24)
- Refusing to repent (Luke 13:3)
- Not being in Christ (Romans 8:1)
- Not obeying the truth (Romans 2:8)
- Sinning willfully (Hebrews 10:26-31)
- Doing evil deeds (John 5:29; Romans 3:8)
- Practicing wickedness, unrighteousness, ungodliness (Acts 8:22; Romans 1:18-2:6)
- Practicing lust/adultery (Matt 5:27-30)
- Having evil thoughts (Matt 15:19-20; Mark 7:20-23)
- Practicing lawlessness (Matt 7:23; 13:41-42)
- Denying Jesus (Matt 10:33; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 12:9; 20:17-18)
- Blaspheming or rejecting the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31-32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10)
- Not bearing fruit (John 15:1-6)
- Causing others to stumble (Matt 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2)
- Refusing to forgive others (Matt 6:15; 18:35)
- Putting others before God (Luke 14:26-33)
- Calling brother a fool (Matt 5:22)
- Following the way of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:15; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:46-47)
- Failing to care for those in need (Matt 25:41-46; Mark 9:41)
- Failing to bear good fruit (Matt 3:10; 7:19)
- Refusing to accept kingdom like a child (Mark 10:15)
- Looking back/quitting/failing to continue faithfully (Luke 9:62; Romans 11:22; Heb. 4:1-11; 6:4-6)

Conclusion

Some have counted about 60 places in the NT that speak of necessity of faith in salvation and thus conclude that faith is all that is needed. But the NT also speaks about many other actions that result in salvation, including repentance about 40 times and baptism about 30 times. In one place it teaches that faith saves us; in another it says that without repentance there is no salvation; in another it says that baptism saves us; in another it says that obeying God saves us, and on and on it goes.

Since none of these are said to be the only thing necessary for salvation, is it not reasonable to conclude that all these things are important and necessary for salvation?! There are numerous verses about the need for each one of these; should we pick only one preferred action and consider all the rest to be optional? Is that a wise understanding and application of God's word? Should we not interpret individual verses about salvation in light of all the verses about salvation?