



# Spirit of Grace Herald

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## Spirit of Grace Ministries

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### Salvation

The most important Biblical and theological issue of all is unquestionably this: how does a person receive eternal life and become a child of God? There is no question more paramount than this one. If you gain eternal life at some point during your years on this earth, you win! If you go through your life without this, you surely lose.

It's a little more complicated than many people think. Nearly all evangelicals understand that simply being good does not guarantee one a spot in heaven for eternity. Indeed, trying to attain heaven by being good is the surest means of not going to heaven. But even evangelicals can be confused about just how this experience of salvation works. Let's look at a few New Testament passages.

After Peter finished preaching on the Day of Pentecost, his convicted hearers asked him: "What shall we do?" Without hesitation, the great apostle told them, **"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** Peter's exhortation made a deep impact on them, and the Bible tells us that 3,000 people were baptized and added to the church that very day.

But Peter's reply, which was that they must repent and be baptized in Jesus' name, would not be looked on with favor by many pastors and church leaders these days. Many of them would not like the command to repent. They are so enamored with the idea of believing that to tell a group of inquiring sinners to repent, which strongly implies a change of both belief and lifestyle, would not sit well with them. And the command to be baptized would not be appreciated by many these days as well. Again, we have such a strong emphasis upon "only believing," that to tell new converts to be baptized, right at the outset of their conviction, would almost be thought of as a works salvation.

They would much prefer Paul's answer to the Philippian jailer, who asked Paul a similar question: **"What must I do to be saved?"** Paul responded, **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."** (Acts 16:31). But although Paul encouraged the man to believe, he evidently did get around to telling him about baptism, because the Bible records: **"And immediately he and all his family were baptized."** (Acts 16:33).



Many people today believe that the only "official" way to get saved is to repeat the "sinner's prayer." This means you admit you are a sinner and ask Jesus to forgive your sins and come into your heart." But in this incident in Philippi, as with Peter's admonition to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, there is no mention of anyone praying a sinner's prayer.

There is a radically different incident of salvation found in the tenth chapter of Acts. When Peter preached Christ to non-Jewish Cornelius, the Bible tells us:

**While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. (Acts 10:44-46)**

# What Makes One a Christian?

Once again, there was no sinner's prayer. Faith simply came to Cornelius and his family and friends as Peter preached. When he heard them all speaking in tongues and sensed the presence of his old Friend, the Holy Spirit, Peter asked: "**Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?**" (Acts 10:47). In other words, "We might as well baptize them. The Holy Spirit has come upon them. They have clearly believed on Jesus!"

Just before He ascended to the Father after His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples: "**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...**" (Matthew 28:19). Here the emphasis is on discipleship. He was declaring that He wanted disciples, students, followers, and He wanted them from every nation. He does not say, "Go and get people to say the sinner's prayer." After all, you can teach a parrot to say the sinner's prayer. He is essentially telling them: "I want followers. It is your job to go make them."

You may be saying: "Ok, so what makes a person a Christian? Is it repentance, is it baptism, is it believing the right things, is it determining to be a follower of Jesus?" The answer is that it is an experience with Jesus that is summed up by the word faith. But Biblical faith is a package that includes baptism, turning away from sin, and a willingness to become a disciple and follower of Jesus.

What salvation is *not* is a cold, dry acknowledgment of Jesus that contains no love, no passion, and no desire to obey the Savior. Jesus said that on judgment day, many would come to Him saying, "Lord, Lord," and declaring how many great things they had done in his name. These people are certain that they are believers, and in a cold and emotionless sense, they are. But their belief never truly became faith, and it never changed their lives or their hearts. Jesus will tell them, "**I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.**" (Matthew 7:23). Real faith, saving faith, Holy Spirit empowered faith will always lead to changed lives and a new passion for Jesus. It will involve repentance, it will involve baptism, and it will result in discipleship.

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