

# **Does Acts 16:31 Tell Us That Believing on the Name of Christ Is the Only Thing One Needs To Do To Be Saved?**

*By Rev. D. Earl Cripe, Ph.D.*

**Acts 16:28** But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

**Acts 16:29** Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

**Acts 16:30** And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

## ***The Beacon That Attracts***

The keeper of the prison beheld the attitude of the apostles in the face of their harsh, premature and unjust persecution. He saw the mighty power of God shaking the doors of the prison open and the shackles off the hands and feet of those who were being kept therein. He was convinced that these men were from God and that God was involved in what they were doing. Even so, he did not know the truth about how to be saved until he talked to the apostles and heard the message. This is always how it happens in the legitimate Church whenever signs and wonders are employed. The purpose is always to draw the unbeliever to the messenger so that he can hear the Gospel of Salvation.

The Philippian jailer understood this. He came in, prostrated himself before the apostles, and ask to hear the message of salvation.

**Acts 16:31** And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

The apostles told the keeper of the prison what he must do to be saved and taught him and his household other things that the Bible had to say on the subject.

Acts 16:31 has given rise to questions and arguments throughout the history of the Church. Is verse 31 complete and free standing as a salvation message in and of itself? Is it true that all any man has to do is believe on the name and the person of Jesus Christ and that act of believing will result in his salvation?

Far be it from me to complicate the message of the simple Gospel and the truth of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Even so, I must point out that verse 31 does not tell us the whole story, nor does it tell us everything that the apostles said to the Philippian jailer, as we will observe in a moment.

### ***Repentance and Conversion***

In the second chapter of Acts, St. Peter said:

**Acts 2:37 ...[They] said unto St. Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?**

**Acts 2:38 Then St. Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.**

St. Peter might have told them many things, but what he did say is singularly important, not only for this event but for the establishment of the Gospel message that the church must propagate throughout the world. He told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins. If they would do that they would receive the gift of this Holy Ghost, the power and influence of which they had been witnessing this day.

**Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.**

Then in Acts 3, he told them that they must repent and be converted. It is often asked if these two passages are really saying two different things. The answer is that it is not a different message. In this instance St. Peter has chosen different words to give the same identical message. **“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord,”** (Acts 3:19) means the same identical thing as, **“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”** (Acts 2:38)

In the true spirit of the message of *being converted* and *being baptized* have the same exact meaning. The Holy Ghost baptizes us into the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and we are converted. “The times of refreshing that will come from the Lord” has the same meaning as “we shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” This passage show how much legalism, narrowness and lack of spiritual depth exists in the Church of Jesus Christ today.

So we must see that implicit in this message to the Philippian jailer is repentance and conversion. No man can be saved by the Gospel unless he comes to the Cross and the Christ of the Cross, acknowledges his lost and sinful condition, gives up on the old world of Adam, and asked to be baptized by the Holy Ghost into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ in order to be born-again as a new creature into the New Creation. As Jesus told Nicodemus in the third chapter of St. John’s Gospel, unless a man is born again he cannot even see the Kingdom of God, much less enter into it.

In spite of the intellectual rationalisms of humanistic theologies, salvation is by grace through faith. Ephesians 2 makes it clear that the faith required to hear and accept the Gospel is not a work, but a gift of God. Every man has the faith to believe. It is given to him by God. When a man can no longer choose, he is no longer alive. There is no legitimate question in Historic Orthodox Christianity as to whether or not men can choose to accept the

Gospel. The questions are: 1) will the evangelists of the Church take the Gospel to him; and 2) will the unbeliever accept it once he has heard it.

In this passage we see that there was more taught to the Philippian jailer than that which we find in verse 31:

**Acts 16:32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.**

**Acts 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.**

How did the jailer know to be baptized? He knew it because it was part of what was being taught to him from the Word of the Lord in verse 32. This is not about baptism in water being part of the means by which a man is Justified. Jesus made that very plain in the first chapter of Acts. **“For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”** (Acts 1:5) (Click here to read our article on Baptism.) It is baptism by the Holy Ghost into the person and the name of Jesus Christ that results in new birth. Even so, two things are evident.

### ***A Change in the Symbol***

The first is that baptism is the symbol or the sign of the New Covenant and testifies to the means of salvation. In the Old Testament, salvation by law was symbolized by circumcision. It was a process in which men purified their lives by the cutting away the flesh by moral and spiritual reformation. In the New Covenant, all efforts of salvation by reformation have been abandoned. Salvation comes to us by death to the old world, baptism by the Holy Ghost into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and a new birth that results in new life in the New Kingdom.

### ***The Urgency of Commitment***

And then, water baptism is part of the teaching of the Gospel. In our times, the term “the Gospel” has been limited to the message of Justification in many instances. That is simply wrong. Everything that is written in the New

Testament letters to churches is part of the Gospel (and about 90% of the letters to the Church are on the subject of Sanctification, not Justification). Immediately upon becoming converted, new Christians were confronted with the demands of Christ upon their lives and the need for Sanctification. Sanctification focuses attention upon the Christian making the decision to die to himself, wash his life clean through obedience to the Word of God (of which the baptismal water is a testimony), and the living of a new life in the New Kingdom. It is not a means of Justification but it is a means of salvation. Sanctification is the salvation of our lives from the power of sin. In this way we will redeem back our lives from the evil shops of pawn where our ancient parents hocked them and immortalize them for eternity. In every case in the New Testament where a person was “saved”, baptism in water followed almost immediately. (There is a situation in Acts 19 when that was not the case, but that is the exception rather than the rule.)

### ***Acts is a Record, Not an Exposition***

And so we see that the apostles taught this man and his household much more than is recorded in these few verses. This man used his free moral agency to accept the Gospel that was preached. By it, he and his household were saved. Furthermore, he and his household pledged themselves to a life of walking in the Kingdom of God and participating in the Mission of the Church.

**Acts 16:34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.**

The change brought about in the life of this man by conversion shows up immediately. He washed the bloody backs of St. Paul and Silas so that they would not get an infection from the damage caused by the lash. He brings them into his house, sets food before them, and he and all of his household rejoice. Only a few hours before this man was so afraid of the Roman magistrates that he was ready to kill himself. Now, by the confidence and the joy of his newfound faith in Christ, that fear has disappeared.