

Question #1: How do you Scripturally explain how one is to be saved?

This of course is the most important, all-encompassing question that must be considered! The Bible in its entirety, and the New Testament (NT) for us specifically, is written to answer this question. And God designed His Word to answer this question for all peoples individually regardless of their culture, background, or place in history! That is why personal, individual Bible study is so important. The terms of N.T. salvation are constant and unchanging, but each individual starts his entrance into God's will from a different position or background. The Scriptures need to meet the individual where he is at, and then bring him to Christ and salvation accordingly.

Of course, in everyone's case the Bible must be first understood as being the Word of God. As the Word of God, it is the source of faith according to Romans 10:17. The Word of God also exists as the final and perfect judge to be used by God on judgment day. Jesus states this in John 12:48. Once the Bible is established as being the final and ultimate authority, then we have a secure, solid starting place.

For most of the people I have studied with so far there are generally two basic approaches that have worked well in our culture and time. One concentrates how "*the gospel*" is defined and applied, starting with Jesus' statement in Mark 16:15 and then following Paul's writing on the subject. The other approach starts with Jesus' promise to give the "*keys of the kingdom*" to Peter, and tracks what Peter said and did starting on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. The first approach seems to connect well with those of protestant background and modern evangelicals who use Paul's writing often. The second seems to help those of Roman Catholic and old-line denominational background. Both general approaches come to the same conclusions and end result regarding salvation. I use the NASB personally, but will interface with any of the versions available today.

In Mark 16:15, Jesus said: "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.*" Some versions use the phrase "good news" for "*gospel*" which generically defines the Greek word used here. But Paul in I Corinthians 15:1-8 specifically defines the term "*gospel*" in the NT writings. Here the "*gospel*" is defined as the "*death,*" "*burial,*" "*resurrection,*" and "*appearance*" of Jesus Christ. (Note: some versions use the phrase "was seen by" rather than "*appeared*" in verses 5-8). So in the Biblical definition of the gospel there are 4 specific parts that compose the gospel that Jesus needs us to proclaim. Furthermore, Galatians 1:6-9 warns us that we must be very careful and accurate in sharing this gospel!

Most people are taught that salvation consists in "*believing*" the gospel, such as stated in Romans 1:16. This of course is true. But the Scriptures also speak of "*obeying*" the gospel in order to be saved--See II Thess. 1:6-9 (especially v. 8) and I Peter 4:17-18.

So the question becomes: Once a person believes the gospel, how does he "*obey the gospel*"? The clearest, most specific statement on how to obey the gospel (that I have found so far) comes in Romans 6:1-4. Here the 4 parts of the gospel are spelled out as to what we are to do to comply with each specific part. Verses 1&2 make it clear that we are to "*die to sin*," which is how we "*obey*" or comply with the death part of the gospel. The biblical word for dying to sin is "*repent*," and was often used by Jesus, John (the forerunner/prophet for Jesus), and Jesus' apostles.

Romans 6:3 and the first part of verse 4 show baptism (immersion) to be the part of the gospel where "*we have been buried with Him*." Many have said that baptism is only symbolic. In one sense I agree--physically baptism is the symbol or representation of the burial. But spiritually it is the only place I find in the Scriptures where we identify with (obey) the burial part of the gospel. So in the spiritual sense it is more than a symbol--it is the reality! Hopefully we'll talk more on this later.

The resurrection for the individual occurs as he comes up out of the water. Again--physically this is very symbolic. At this point the baptism of Jesus serves as the example for us. When Jesus came up out of the water, the Father sent to Him the Holy Spirit in the physical likeness of a dove. "*And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'*" (Matthew 3:16-17, see also Mark 1:9-10.) So also we are resurrected, given new life, as we receive the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Luke's gospel account of Jesus' baptism gives us the fact that He was praying as He came up out of the water (Luke 3:21) and later He stated that "*your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him*" (Luke 11:13). By faith the same can be true for us if we are literally obeying the resurrection part of the gospel. We can be "*resurrected*" with Christ as Romans 6:4 specifically states "*as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too...*" Romans 6:5 and 6:11 also underline the resurrection part of the gospel as being obeyed in coming up out of the water.

The fourth and last part of obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ entails "*walking in newness of life*" (Romans 6:4). Jesus in His appearance for the 40 days following His resurrection (Acts 1:3) proved His bodily resurrection by showing people! So also do we. The rest of our life is to prove our resurrection as we walk by the Spirit. This is how we obey the appearance part of the gospel. Jesus said it this way in Rev. 2:10b: "*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*" Note also in I Cor. 15:3-8; four verses are used to emphasize the appearance, while the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ are only given one-half of a verse apiece. Such an emphasis on the appearance suggests that a changed life after baptism proves and validates one's salvation, and is at least as important as the baptism itself!

So how we are to "*be saved*" starts with belief in Jesus and specifically the gospel of Jesus Christ (John 20:30&31). We are then to obey the gospel by

repenting of our sins, being buried with Christ in baptism, and arising to walk in newness of life by the Spirit as long as we remain in this body. So the entirety of one uniting with Christ is a process of "*being saved*." Acts 2:47, Romans 5:10, I Cor. 1:18, and II Cor. 2:15 all use the phrase "*being saved*." So salvation by means of "*obeying the gospel*" begins at baptism and continues throughout a person's entire life until he leaves this body of flesh.

Often people who utilize Paul's writings to lead people to salvation use Scriptures such as Romans 10:9-10 and Ephesians 2:8-9. Such Scriptures, they say, prove that one does not have to be baptized in order to be saved. All one has to do is believe and confess Christ. Often a so-called "sinner's prayer" is recited for salvation. The New International Version even translates the end of Romans 10:10 as "you confess and are saved."

In answer to these claims, I refer back to the author Paul's salvation testimony in Acts. Acts 22:1-16 is very clear and this is where I start. Acts 9:1-19 also states Paul's conversion account, and has information to supplement the Acts 22 account; especially Acts 9:9 and 11. Acts 9:9 and 11 reveal that Paul was 3 days without sight after entering Damascus and was fasting and praying during that time. This information can be inserted between verses 11&12 of Acts 22 to get the complete picture.

With this text I then ask: "When was Paul saved?" There are three distinct possibilities here:

1. on the road when He called upon Jesus as Lord (Acts 22:10), or
2. in Damascus during his 3 days of prayer (Acts 9:9,11), or
3. when Ananias baptized him (Acts 22:16).

Note that in Acts 22:16 Paul was commanded to: "*Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.*" So when did Paul receive the forgiveness of his sins? When people say "on the road," I ask—"Then are you saying Paul's sins were forgiven 3 days before his sins were washed away?" If a person responds that Paul's 3 days of prayer ("the sinner's prayer") saved him, I respond: "Then was he saved before his sins were washed away?" Obviously Paul's salvation account in Acts pegs his baptism as the point where his sins were washed away! The only real question remaining regards whether or not the washing away of one's sins constitutes a part of being saved! To the reasonable person, the answer is clear.

The second general basic approach I use with people, especially those of Roman Catholic or old main-line denominational background, has to do with Peter's authority and teaching. This also seems to connect with those of little or no Biblical background.

First I start with Matthew 16:13-19. Several issues can be addressed in this text. First of course is the foundational belief that Jesus is the Christ, and that He is God in the flesh (v.16). Of course there are other supporting verses that can

and should be brought in on this starting point of who Jesus is, including: John 1:1-4,14,17-18, and John 20:30-31.

In studying through Matthew 16:18, often a discussion arises concerning Peter being the rock, upon which the Church of Jesus will be built. The Greek languages grammar clarifies understanding here as the name Peter "*Petros*" and the term rock "*Petra*" have the same root, but have different genders; *Petros* is masculine and must be a person, while *Petra* is neuter and must be a thing. The conclusion being, the *Petra* upon which the Church is built is Peter's statement of belief concerning Jesus earlier in Matthew 16:16, which reads: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" This confession is the foundation upon which each person must stand in becoming part of the Church Jesus is building. Note also the dialogue that follows in Matthew 16:21 between Jesus and Peter, where Jesus says to Peter: "*Get behind Me, Satan You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.*" This statement certainly raises doubts as to Jesus putting Peter the man in charge as head or foundation of the Church!

But the most important truth presented for salvation in the Matthew 16 text regards Jesus' statement in verse 19. He [Jesus] gives Peter specifically "*the keys of the kingdom of heaven.*" Note the first "*you*" in v.19 is singular in the Greek and refers to Peter and Peter alone. On our website in the downloads section, under "essays" I have a paper entitled "Peter and the Keys" which goes into depth regarding the implications of Peter receiving the keys of the kingdom. But for our purposes here, the NT way of getting into Christ, and ultimately heaven itself, is given initially and conclusively by Peter; through His preaching and commands found in Acts chapters 1-12, and I & II Peter.

In Acts chapter 2 we find the details of the beginning of the Church. Here Peter preaches the first NT gospel sermon, v.14-36. The body of the message proves who Jesus was using several Old Testament (OT) passages. Peter's final statement (v.36) concludes that Jesus is Lord and Christ, which mirrors his initial confession found in Matthew 16:16.

Then when the audience of Acts 2 is convicted by Peter's message, believing that Jesus is the Christ, they ask, "*What shall we do?*" (Acts 2:37) Here Peter responds: "*Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 2:38)

Acts 2:38 constitutes the "front door key" or how a person is initially saved. First one must repent. There is much to say about repentance, but we will leave that for later—but in personal Bible study we spend lots of time on this pre-requisite for baptism. The example of John, the forerunner of Christ, gives us an example of how important repentance is; as he would not baptize anyone who did not "*bear fruits in keeping with repentance*" (see Luke 3:7-14).

After fruits showing repentance are evident, then one is baptized (immersed in water) in the name (authority, power) of Jesus Christ. This immersion is "*for*" the forgiveness of sins. The Greek term is "*eis*" which is translated "with a view toward" by scholars such as Alfred Marshall. But much debate occurs here—many denominations saying "*eis*" can mean "because of." In other words, they

say, a person is baptized “because” he has already received forgiveness of sins earlier (the sinner’s prayer is often referenced) and his baptism is just showing publically that he already is a Christian. But note Matthew 26:28, which uses the same identical Greek phrase “*for forgiveness of sins.*” The question I ask is this: “Did Jesus go to the cross and shed His blood because the sins of mankind had already been forgiven, or did He go to the cross with a view towards actually purchasing the forgiveness of sins?” I think the only Biblically reasonable answer here is that Jesus shed his blood on the cross to purchase and obtain forgiveness of sins for mankind. Thus the same phrase in Acts 2:38 would mean that we are to be baptized to obtain (*for; eis*) the forgiveness of our sins. Note also, *baptism for the forgiveness of sins*, is the same phrase used for John’s baptism—Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3—and the people here were confessing their sins as they were being baptized! Therefore I stand on the fact that Acts 2:38 commands water baptism in the name of Jesus to obtain forgiveness of sins for the individual being immersed.

The final statement in Acts 2:38 says: “*and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” There is much study to fully understand this part of the promise of water baptism in the name of Jesus. But for us right now, the baptism of Jesus Himself gives a simple, clear picture. In all three accounts, Matthew 3:16-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21&22, Jesus received the Holy Spirit sent from the Father as He came out of the water. I see this as an example for us. The Holy Spirit we receive is the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:14-16, Galatians 4:4-7), who indwells us (Romans 8:9, I Corinthians 6:19-20), and is the pledge of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13&14). Note that only after we have been completely cleansed of all sin can the Spirit come into our bodies. Coming up out of the water, after having the complete removal of sins by the blood of Christ, is the only possible time and place that the Spirit can be received to indwell us!

After this initial preaching on the day of Pentecost 3,000 persons obeyed Peter’s directive in Acts 2:38, as stated in Acts 2:41. Notice also Peter’s statement in Acts 2:39. The promise of Acts 2:38 (repentance and baptism yields forgiveness and the Holy Spirit) is not only for the Jews and their offspring, but also for “*all who are far off.*” The term “*far off*”, as used in such Scripture passages as Ephesians 2:13, refers to the Gentiles or non-Jewish peoples. The phrase “*as many as the Lord God will call to Himself*” regards the fact that until Jesus returns the promise of Acts 2:38 is in effect. This, in a nutshell, is how one is initially saved out of the world and gets into Christ for the entirety of the Church Age.

Peter was also used to open the door of salvation to the Gentiles, as recorded in Acts chapters 10 and 11. This text is very technical and confusing for many, but a thorough study reveals that God used Peter to share the same pattern of Acts 2:38 for the Gentiles also, after a miraculous demonstration similar to what He did in Acts 2:2-4. For time and clarity sake we will look at Acts chapters 10 and 11 together at a later setting. Jay Wilson’s booklet “The Holy Spirit” contains a detailed explanation on the conversion of the household of Cornelius, the first Gentiles to become Christians.

Also Peter's initial salvation key is shown clearly in one of his letters—1 Peter 3:21. In this verse the kernel sentence reads: "*Baptism now saves you.*" For those who say baptism is a work and therefore cannot save a person, this verse is certainly an eye-opener! Every English translation of the Bible that I have seen to date renders the wording of this verse differently. I think this is because its meaning is so clear, yet it goes against most modern (and popular) teaching on salvation. Yet in all the English versions of 1 Peter 3:21 I have seen so far, the simple wording of the kernel sentence "*Baptism now saves you*" remains intact. Again, more on this later if there are any questions or "loose-ends" that need tie-up.

These are the two basic lines of Scripture that I use most often in teaching people that the Lord has led me to study with. Because of the nature of individual Bible study, and the enormous differences of backgrounds that people may have, there are many more avenues to arrive at the one gospel of Jesus Christ, the *one faith* and the *one baptism* (Ephesians 4:5). The Bible is designed to reach any person where they are currently at on a uniquely individual basis, and bring him to Christ from there. This is a general overview to this question: "How do you Scripturally explain how one is to be saved?"

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