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133 The Gospel Plan Of Salvation

1. Introduction

How does a person become a Christian? What's involved in being saved and how do we know that we're saved. These are questions that a lot of people ask and in this video we'll take a look at exactly what the Bible has to say about the subject. Stay with me as we explore **The Gospel Plan of Salvation**.

Since the first century a number of religious bodies have risen based on a variety of doctrines and practices. With the number of conflicting and sometimes confusing ideas it's difficult to know what to believe. Although all of these churches claim to be following God and Christ there are a lot of differences between them, some of which can't be reconciled with each other or the Bible. In order for us to answer any spiritual question we need to go back to the source and find out what it says. In this video we'll take a look at

- a. What Christ commanded his disciples who later became his apostles then
- b. We'll examine the work of the apostles and how they carried out Christ's directives
- c. To understand conversion we'll take a look at examples from the book of Acts
- d. Then I'll demonstrate that there is a plan of salvation and ...
- e. We'll compare that to the examples of conversion
- f. Once we have a good understanding of conversion I'll discuss
 1. **John 3.16** & the sinners prayer and
 2. The idea of salvation by faith only

When we're done, I believe you'll have a good idea of what the Bible teaches and you'll be able to make a more informed decision about your own salvation and standing with God.

2. Christ's Commands

As Christ prepared to leave his disciples he assured them that they would not be alone. Christ stated, ***"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."*** (John 16.12-13).

The promised comforter Christ spoke of was the Holy Spirit. As we take a look at this passage we see what assistance these men would have. First of all the Spirit would guide them into all truth. Not everything they needed to know had been revealed. Some things would not be known or revealed for some time. The unfolding of the Gospel in the first century was a process that took place over time. As we read the story of the early church in the book of Acts we can see that there were situations the apostles had to work at to understand even though they were being guided by the Holy Spirit.

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Another notable fact is that the Spirit would repeat that which he had heard. Christ stated that he had given the words God gave to him to his disciples as he prayed in Gethsemane in **John 17.8**. The word originated with God, was brought into the world by Christ and would be completely revealed by the Holy Spirit assisting the apostles as they continued Christ's work.

Finally Christ told the apostles that the Holy Spirit would reveal things to come. This may have included predictions of events at times, but in the context of this conversation, it points to the revelation of God's will at precise moments as the kingdom was established and their knowledge of the Gospel grew.

The Law of Moses was in effect until Christ died on the cross. The end of the Law and way to salvation through Jesus was symbolized by the parting of the veil in the Temple showing that the barrier between man and God was removed. Paul uses this figure in his letter to the Ephesians demonstrating that the distinction between Jew and Gentile was also removed (**Eph 2.14**). While the Law had been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ, the new law wasn't made public until the day of Pentecost when the apostles received the Holy Spirit and Peter preached the first Gospel sermon. The significance of this event can't be understated.

Until this time the Gentile world, having digressed into idolatry centuries earlier, did not have a relationship with the Lord. The Jews on the other hand were in a covenant relationship with God based on their ancestry and the Law of Moses. Jews born into their respective families were circumcised on the eighth day as commanded and grew up learning the various ordinances and practices of the Law. There was a lot of pride in being God's people and the Jewish nation embraced the idea of being saved based on their shared descent from Abraham. But on the day of Pentecost that changed.

Christ prepared his disciples for this as he prepared to ascend into heaven. He stated, "***All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.***" (Matt 28.18-20).

Mark also records this command stating, "***Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.***" (Mark 16.15-16). Let's take a look at these statements closely so we understand exactly what Christ is telling them.

First is the command to go into all the world. Up until this time the Jews were God's chosen people and while some Gentiles became proselytes and kept the law, they were still foreigners under strict restrictions. Note that Christ tells them to teach all nations. Up to this time Christ had only gone to the Jews. Now, his disciples were to go everywhere carrying the message of God.

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Matthew records Christ's command to "*teach all nations*" while Mark defines this as "*every creature*". In these statements it's abundantly clear that the Gospel isn't just for the Jews who had settled in other areas of the world. It would take some time before the apostles understood this directive to include the Gentiles but Jesus indicated that in his instructions.

Christ also states that believers were to be taught to observe the things he commanded. Not to get too far off the point here I'd like to mention that there are some who believe that what Christ taught during his earthly ministry - that which is revealed in the Gospel accounts - isn't binding today. Christ's statement however emphasizes that whatever he told the apostles was to be repeated and more would be added. Let's summarize what we have so far so we understand what's being taught.

- a. The apostles were to go and teach everyone
- b. Those who were taught were to be baptized when they believed
- c. Things Christ taught were to be repeated and observed

Christ then ascended to the Father and the apostles are told to wait in Jerusalem for the power that the Lord promised them. This will also fulfill prophecies concerning the beginning of the new law as recorded in the prophets. Ten days after Christ's ascension, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit falls on the apostles and Peter preaches the first Gospel sermon.

3. Pentecost & the Apostles

On the day of Pentecost the apostles received the power Christ promised them. Luke records these events in Acts chapter two. "*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*" (Acts 2.1-4). This was the fulfillment of Christ's promise that the apostles would receive power from on high. At this point there are two things we need to understand clearly.

First, who was it on the day of Pentecost that "*were all filled*" with the Holy Spirit. Some teach that all disciples gathered received the Holy Spirit at this time and use that argument to support the idea of a miraculous endowment of power today. This is an example of how important it is to establish and maintain the context of a passage. From reading the first chapter of Acts we understand that there were about 120 disciples gathered together with the twelve (Acts 1.15). Some of these were also present when Christ ascended into Heaven as we can see this as a requirement in the selection of a replacement for Judas in Acts 1.16-26. The narrative however narrows the focus to the apostles at the end of chapter one, not the collective group of all disciples. This is consistent with Christ's promise that the apostles would be given this power to guide them. As we continue into the opening verses of chapter two of Acts we find this focus

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remains on the twelve apostles which now includes Matthias who replaced Judas.

When the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles they began to speak in the languages of those gathered in Jerusalem. Hearing this take place some proposed that the men were drunk. Peter explained that the apostles weren't drunk and reveals what is taking place. He then quotes **Joel 2.28-32** demonstrating that the people were seeing the fulfillment of God's promises. Peter declares that Christ was the Messiah who had been approved before them with signs and wonders but they had delivered him up to death. He emphasized the fact that all of these things occurred according to God's plan including raising Christ from the dead.

As further proof, Peter refers to the Psalms showing that David spoke of Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed one who would sit on his throne forever (**Acts 2.25-31**). Peter declared that Christ, the anointed one, was Lord, and was sitting at the right hand of God. Hearing these things they then cried out, "***Men and brethren, what shall we do?***" (**Acts 2.37**). Peter's response to that question demonstrates the execution of Christ's commands

Peter answered their question, stating, "***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**). Remember Christ told them to teach. Peter had done that showing that Jesus was the Messiah who God raised from the dead. The people then indicated their belief in Christ and what they had been told as they asked what they needed to do. Peter's response was in line with Christ's directive to baptize those who believed. Luke records that there were about three thousand who were saved that day.

Now let's review other examples of conversion in the book and then we'll compare them.

4. Conversions in the book of Acts

Samaritans (Acts 8.5-13)

After the death of Steven in Acts chapter seven we're told that a persecution was mounted against the church causing the disciples to scatter. As they did so they taught the Gospel in the places they went including the city of Samaria. When the evangelist Philip came to the city and preached the Gospel (**Acts 8.5**) the people listened to the word being taught and believed after which they were baptized in **Acts 8.12**.

Simon (Acts 8.13)

In Samaria we're introduced to a sorcerer named of Simon who had led the people of Samaria to believe that he possessed great power. Luke tells us that Simon also believed the word and after being baptized continued to associate with Philip being amazed at the things the evangelist was able to perform. The important thing to note here is that Simon, who had been

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fooling the people of Samaria prior to this (**Acts 8.9**) realized that the power Philip possessed was very different from what he had been doing.

Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8.36-41)

The latter portion of **Acts 8** introduces the Ethiopian eunuch, treasurer of queen Candace. On his way home from worshipping in Jerusalem he was reading from the prophet Isaiah. The Holy Spirit directed Philip to go South and join the man's chariot. When Philip heard the eunuch he asked if the man understood what he was reading. The eunuch invited Philip to join him in the chariot "*Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.*" (**Acts 8.35**).

What Philip told the eunuch isn't recorded, but enough information was provided prompting the man to ask, "*See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*" (**Acts 8.36**). Philip's response was simple and direct. He replied, "*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.*" (**Acts 8.37**). The eunuch then stated, "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*" (**Acts 8.37**).

The eunuch then "*... commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.*" (**Acts 8.38-39**). Note that in this account the eunuch, already a believer in God, heard the word preached by Philip. He believed what was taught and made a verbal statement, or confession, of his belief that Christ is the son of God and was baptized.

Saul (Acts 9.1-9, 22.6-16, 26.12-40)

The conversion of the apostle Paul, or Saul as he was known prior to becoming a Christian, highlights several important points that help us understand the plan of salvation. We know that Saul was a zealous man (**Acts 22.3**), was present at the stoning of Stephen (**Acts 8.1**), was an aristocrat raised in the company of Herod and other notables of the day (**Acts 13.1**) and had studied at the feet of Gamaliel (**Acts 22.3**). Saul was also a Roman citizen (**Acts 22.25**) and would later use his citizenship to reach the city of Rome by appealing to Caesar.

Saul appears to be a prominent figure in the severe persecution that rose against the church. Luke writes, "*And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*" (**Acts 9.1-2**).

Saul intended to protect the traditions of the Jews from this new teaching that threatened

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the purity of the Jewish religion. This movement had to be stopped and in order to accomplish this believers were arrested, tried and put to death as Stephen had been. Although his heart was in the right place, his actions were wrong as he found out.

On the way to Damascus to arrest Christians, an event occurred that changed the course of Saul's life. ***“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.”*** (Acts 9.3-9).

Christ appeared to Saul and gave him some very important instructions but note that Christ didn't teach him the Gospel. He simply let Saul know that he was fighting God in his actions and persecuting Jesus by attacking believers. Saul was told to go into the city and wait until he was told what to do.

A believer in the city named Ananias received a vision in which he was told, ***“Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.”*** (Acts 9.11-12). Ananias was reluctant to do this, having heard of the persecution Saul mounted against the church, to which Christ revealed, ***“Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.”*** (Acts 9.15-16).

“And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.” (Acts 9.17-18).

Saul eventually changed his name to Paul and was later separated by the Holy Spirit as the apostle who would carry the Gospel to the Gentile world. In the book of Acts the account of Paul's conversion appears three times. When it initially takes place in chapter nine and later as Paul appears before governors and the rulers of Judea in chapters 22 and 26. From these accounts we can summarize what that took place as he obeyed the Gospel.

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First of all, Saul was a believer in God and the Law and was zealous toward it to the point that he was willing to take any measures needed to protect it. The problem was that his ideas were wrong. Second, while Christ appeared to Saul, which was a needed event to qualify him as an apostle of the Lord, Jesus didn't teach or preach the Gospel to him. That was left in the hands of a human agent fulfilled by Ananias. Third, Saul had a change of heart in his beliefs and accepted Christ as Lord as we can see in the fact that he followed Christ's instructions and was baptized when Ananias told him what he needed to do.

Cornelius (Acts 10.25-48)

Events recorded in Acts chapter 10 may have taken place as much as ten years after the establishment of the church. In spite of the fact that Jesus told the apostles to go and teach all nations, this idea hadn't been fully understood or realized. Through chapter nine we see primarily Jews converted. The Samaritans although not full blooded Hebrews are still nonetheless related to the family of Abraham and therefore not Gentiles. The Ethiopian eunuch was most likely a proselyte and was therefore technically a Jew. But Palestine was full of Romans, Greeks and others who had not heard the Gospel yet. A Roman centurion's conversion is about to change that.

The conversion of Cornelius will be the subject of a later lesson so I won't spend a lot of time on certain aspects of this occurrence. The point that needs to be made is that the Jewish Christians still had the mindset that they were God's chosen people and looked on the Gentiles as unclean. This was prevalent even in the church as we see in later chapters of Acts and was one of the biggest problems for Christians of the first century. While teaching the Gospel there was confusion about the traditions and practices of the Law. If something was going to change their minds about God's acceptance of the Gentiles in the kingdom it would have to be something irrefutable and that's exactly what happens.

Luke describes Cornelius as "*A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*" (Acts 10.2). God was aware of the Roman's prayers and sent an angel who told him to "*...send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.*" (Acts 10.5-6). Cornelius immediately sent two of his servants and a soldier who served him to bring Peter to his house.

As the servants of Cornelius approached Simon the tanner's home Peter was on the roof praying when he had a vision that was repeated three times recorded in Acts 10.9-16. In each instance Peter saw animals that were unclean under the Law of Moses. He heard a voice commanding him to "*Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.*" (Acts 10.13). Peter's response to this was, "*Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.*" (Acts 10.14). The voice then told Peter, "*What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*" (Acts 10.15). Peter was then told that there were three men who had come seeking him (Acts 10.19) and he was to go

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with them because they had been sent to him by God.

As the story unfolds Peter arrives at the centurion's home where Cornelius had gathered his family and close friends. When Cornelius began to worship Peter he stopped him stating, "***Stand up; I myself also am a man.***" (Acts 10.26). After hearing Cornelius account of how he came to send for Peter, the apostle realized what his vision had meant as he declared, "***Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.***" (Acts 10.34-35). Peter then went on to preach Christ to those gathered there. As Peter spoke an event occurred which causes some misunderstanding in regard to salvation.

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." (Acts 10.44-46). At this point many conclude that the Centurion and his household were saved but as we continue we'll find that this is not a correct conclusion.

Seeing what has taken place, Peter asks, "***Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord...***" (Acts 10.47). The elements of Cornelius conversion are similar to what we've seen with the other examples. Cornelius heard the word as preached by Peter. Having heard the word he obviously accepted what was taught and the result of his belief and those gathered who also believed was that they were baptized. So if they were all baptized, why was the Holy Spirit sent by God?

The answer to that question addresses two problems. One was the attitude of the Jews toward Gentiles, and the other was the need for God to supply a proof that the Gentiles were acceptable that couldn't be contested. Remember Peter told Cornelius, "***Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation...***" (Acts 10.28). Peter had received a vision, was told that what God cleansed shouldn't be considered unclean and then was instructed to go the home of the Roman. As I noted earlier, Peter came to a realization that it was God's will to include the Gentiles in his plan to save mankind. The other Jewish Christians however weren't present for this event and would need convincing.

The first group that learned this was at Cornelius home. "***And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.***" (Acts 10.45). Here we have devout Jews who had accompanied Peter and had their eyes opened being present when the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his household. When the brethren in Judea heard that Peter had gone to the house of a Gentile and preached to them they were ready to argue (Acts 11.2). In their minds this

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wasn't something that shouldn't be done. They were Jews and although they were Christians they hadn't realized that the new law was for all people.

Peter was literally called on the carpet so to speak to explain his actions. He met with the brethren and recounted the entire episode beginning with the vision that he saw. He then described what took place at Cornelius home. Peter stated, ***“And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?”*** (Acts 11.15-17). The appearance of the Holy Spirit hadn't saved the Gentiles, but had provided the proof that was needed to convince well intended Christians that they needed to change their way of thinking. Luke records, ***“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”*** (Acts 11.18).

This marked a turning point in the church. Not long after this Saul, or Paul, the apostle will be sent to the Gentile world carrying the Gospel. Even though the Holy Spirit had appeared and the story was accepted, it was difficult for Jewish Christians to let go of centuries old traditions that were founded on a law that spelled death for violations of certain things. However, the change made by God and was part of His plan to save everyone. While the Holy Spirit figures into the events, the salvation of Cornelius and others who believed on that occasion was through hearing and believing the word and being baptized just as Christ had commanded.

Lydia (Acts 16.13-15)

In Acts sixteen Paul received a vision in which a man prayed for Paul to come to Macedonia and help them (Acts 16.9). Coming to Philippi we're introduced to Lydia, a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira who worshiped God. After hearing the word preached by Paul she and her household were baptized (Acts 16.15). Note the elements present or implied in this account. Lydia was a believer in God and we can conclude that she worshiped according to the law of Moses. Upon hearing the word preached concerning Christ, she believed and in that belief responded by being baptized. We can also conclude that repentance was present in the fact that her worship to God would change and be directed to the Lord in the name of Christ following the pattern we find in the New Testament.

Philippian Jailer (Acts 16.34)

Paul remained in Philippi for a time and preached the word of God. A woman possessed with a spirit of divination followed them proclaiming ***“These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation...”*** (Acts 16.17). After a time Paul was ***“grieved”*** with this (Acts 16.18) and cast the spirit out of the woman. There were those who had used her to make money and seeing their livelihood taken away they had Paul and Silas arrested,

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beaten and thrown into prison (Acts 16.19-24). That night an earthquake shook the prison causing the doors of the cells to open. As the jailor was about to kill himself Paul called out to him stating, “*Do thyself no harm: for we are all here*” (Acts 16.28). Paul and Silas had been in the stocks and over the course of the evening had been singing praises to God. The jailor called for a light, brought them out of the prison and asked, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16.30).

Paul’s response to the jailor is simple. He informed the man, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*” (Acts 16.31). Some might be led to believe that only a simple acknowledgment of Christ was needed as some teach today, but we can see what the jailor’s belief led to in order for him to be saved. Luke records, “*And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*” (Acts 16.33-34). Notice that Luke indicates that the man was baptized and describes those who had done this as believing in God. We can conclude that belief that resulted in their salvation included baptism as we have seen in the other examples recorded.

Corinthians (Acts 18.8)

In Acts chapter eighteen Paul arrives in Corinth. There he reasoned in the synagogues attempting to teach the Jews that Christ was the Messiah. Their rejection was so profound that Paul then turned to the Gentiles (Acts 18.6). Some of the Jews believed including Justus and Crispus who was the “*chief ruler of the synagogue*” (Acts 18.8). Justus, Crispus and a number of Corinthians believed and were baptized (Acts 18.8). Once more we find the same pattern repeating in Corinth. The Gospel was preached. Hearers believed what they were told and they responded by being baptized.

Ephesian Men (Acts 19.1-7)

Leaving Corinth, Paul came to Ephesus where he found a number of men who believed but had not been baptized into Christ. Paul asked, “*Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*” (Acts 19.3-5). The baptism of John was in preparation for the coming of Christ and was a baptism of repentance to call the Jews back to God. After the church was established the baptism of repentance was no longer valid as can be seen here.

What we can take away from this account is that there are those who believed in God but their belief was based on incomplete information which was clarified by Paul’s teaching. When they heard the Gospel preached they were baptized. These individuals belief and action identifies

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their desire to change, or repent, leading them to complete their obedience through baptism.

5. Comparison of examples of conversion

Now that we've reviewed the examples of conversion let's compare them. This chart shows each example, their related references and elements revealed in each. As we review the chart we'll look for similarities and common elements.

| | Reference | Heard Word | Believed | Repented | Confessed | Baptized |
|------------------|----------------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Jews / Pentecost | Acts 2 | x | i | x | i | x |
| Samaritans | Acts 8.5-13 | x | x | i | i | x |
| Simon | Acts 8.13 | x | x | i | i | x |
| Eunuch | Acts 8.36-41 | x | x | i | x | x |
| Saul | Acts 9, 22, 26 | x | x | x | i | x |
| Cornelius | Acts 10.25-48 | x | x | i | i | x |
| Lydia | Acts 16.13-15 | x | x | i | i | x |
| Jailor | Acts 16.34 | x | x | i | i | x |
| Corinthians | Acts 18.8 | x | x | i | i | x |
| Ephesians | Acts 19.1-7 | x | x | x | i | x |

x = recorded i = implied in the narrative

a. **Jews on Pentecost** - The Jews on the day of Pentecost obviously heard the word preached and Jesus identified as the Messiah. Hearing this they were convicted of being guilty of the death of Christ and asked what they should do. Peter told them to repent and we find that 3,000 were baptized on that day.

b. **The Samaritans** heard the message of the Gospel as preached by Philip and came to believe what they were told. Those who believed were baptized.

c. **Simon**, also believed what Philip preached as the people had and was also baptized.

d. **The Ethiopian eunuch** heard the Gospel preached as Philip taught from the writing of Isaiah. When he asked what was hindering him from being baptized, Philip stated that if he believed, this could be done. The eunuch then confessed his belief in Christ after which he was baptized.

e. **Saul** was told to repent and be baptized calling on the name of the Lord. He believed the preaching of the Gospel since he had seen Christ and was made aware of how he was hurting the Lord by attacking his children. Saul was baptized as the final part of his conversion.

f. **Cornelius** heard the word preached by Peter and believing what was heard was baptized.

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g. **Lydia**, attended to the things spoken by Paul and she believed and was baptized.

h. The **Philippian jailor** asked Paul what he needed to do to be saved. Hearing the word he and his household believed and were baptized.

i. At **Corinth** “*many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized*” (Acts 18.8). In the brief account given by Luke we know that Paul taught the Gospel of salvation in the name of Christ and those who believed completed their obedience to God in baptism.

j. The **Ephesian men** in Acts 19 believed in God as shown by their acceptance of the baptism of John. These men weren’t saved so Paul preached the Gospel of salvation in the name of Christ after which they believed and were baptized.

So far we can see that the common elements include the fact that the Gospel was preached by a human agent. Most who heard the word are described as having believed. Some, such as the Jews on Pentecost, Saul and the Ephesians repented. The Ethiopian eunuch was directed to affirm his belief or offer a confession. In each case of conversion we see without exception they were baptized. The baptism here was an immersion in water.

Not all of the elements of our plan of salvation are specifically listed in each example of conversion. Looking at our chart we can fill in some of these blanks by drawing some logical conclusions based on the record. By doing this we aren’t altering the word or doctrine taught. We’re simply taking a look at what was obviously in place.

a. The Jews on Pentecost had to believe in what Peter stated or they wouldn’t have been convicted of their sin or been baptized. They would also necessarily have to convey that through some affirmation or confession to let the apostles know they wanted to be reconciled with God.

b. The Samaritans historically had worshiped in their own way and didn’t associate with the Jews. Accepting the preaching of Philip would of necessity indicate repentance on their part. They would also have to acknowledge this to Philip constituting confession of their belief in Christ.

c. Simon had been enjoying a life of fooling the people but now in order to be saved he would need to have a change of intent, or repent, of what he had been doing. The necessity of revealing this to Philip implies confession as well.

d. The Ethiopian eunuch, although a believer, would be called on to change the way in which he worshiped God. His departure from the Law would be a turning point in his life and is a clear example of repentance.

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e. Saul, after seeing Christ on the road to Damascus, was already in a penitent state. An affirmation to Ananias of his belief and desire to be baptized would constitute confession.

f. Cornelius would also have to change the way he thought of God and in worship. His acceptance of what Peter taught implies his desire to change his life, or repent. He would have to acknowledge this, or confess his belief, in order to be baptized.

g. Lydia, a believer, would also have to repent or change her way of thinking and worshipping. Her acceptance of this logically would have to be included as she relayed her desire to be baptized to Paul which would constitute a confession of her belief.

h. The Philippian jailor was in a penitent state when he asked Paul and Silas what he had to do be saved indicating a desire to repent or change his life. His acceptance of what was taught would also logically be vocalized as well.

i. The men in Ephesus who had been baptized according to the baptism of John were willing to repent as the account bears out. They would need to acknowledge their acceptance of what Paul taught constituting a confession of their belief in Christ and the Gospel message.

Note that by coming to these conclusions we haven't changed the accounts or introduced any variation of doctrine. What we can see is that the individuals converted were at a different point in their belief. Some simply needed to believe while others needed to repent or confess the name of Christ. Filling in these blanks didn't change the message or alter any requirement they had to meet. What we can determine is that each example ends with baptism for the remission of sins in the name of Christ.

6. But is there a plan of salvation?

When some believers hear this they quickly point out that such a “**plan of salvation**” isn't found in the New Testament. Christians however teach that there is, and summarize it in a series of steps as follows:

1. One must hear the word of God
2. Having heard the word one needs to believe it
3. Belief leads to a desire to change or repent in order to follow God
4. Reaching this point demands that we acknowledge Christ by confessing him
5. Finally, we're to be baptized, or immersed in water, for the remission of our sins

But there are many who adamantly deny this and accuse the Church of Christ of making this up. To demonstrate that this isn't something the Church of Christ came up with we can turn to the writings of Paul, and one passage in particular, that logically lays these steps out for us.

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“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” (Rom 10.14-15)

In this passage Paul continues a discussion of salvation and conversion from the previous verses of the chapter. First, let's list the elements involved in this process as they appear here.

1. How shall they call on him
2. In whom they have not believed
3. How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard
4. How shall they hear without a preacher

Now let's place these in reverse order -

1. How shall they hear without a **preacher**
2. How shall they believe in him of whom they have not **heard**
3. In whom they have not **believed**
4. How shall they **call** on him

To clarify this we summarize the idea in each as

1. Someone is sent to teach or preach the word
2. Individuals must be willing to hear the word
3. Hearers then decide to believe what they've heard
4. Believers then “call” on the Lord - we'll define this as we move forward

Now let's compare this with what the scriptures say about obedience and conversion.

1. **How shall they hear without a preacher** - before ascending into heaven, Christ told his disciples ***“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...” (Matt 28.19)***. Christ came into the world to begin delivering the Gospel message and offer himself as the final sacrifice for sin. It is the will of God that all people turn to him and be reconciled. To that end the apostles, and later those who believed through their word, were to teach. We see that happening in the early church. In Acts 8, when the persecution became so intense that Christians had to disperse, they ***“went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8.4)***.

2. **How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard** - The facts of the Gospel are simple. From Acts 2 and other passages we see that the apostles and others taught that Christ was the Messiah - the one who was to come and reconcile man to God. The message was that Christ had come in the flesh, offered himself as the final sacrifice for sin, was put to death by the evil of mankind but raised from the dead by the power of God. The power of the resurrection is the death of sin and hope of eternal life with God. Along with this is Christ's statement that the

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apostles were to teach “...*them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ...* (Matt 28.20). This is the body of knowledge presented as the Gospel was taught in the first century and should be the only thing taught today. Once the facts are presented individuals are able to make a decision about what they’ve heard.

3. In whom they have not believed - In each of the examples of conversion the listeners were presented with the Gospel. Once that was done those who were in attendance had to make a decision about what to do with what they learned. While I’ve gone over examples of those in the book of Acts who responded positively to the Gospel message, there are others that didn’t. This is the same decision that people have to make today.

4. How shall they call on him - Reading the example of the conversion of Saul, or Paul in the book of Acts we can see that the process of “*calling on the name of the Lord*” involved repentance and being baptized as seen in Acts 22.16.

We can now simplify the list to summarize what takes place when one is converted to Christ as

1. Hearing the word of God
2. Believing in Christ as the son of God
3. Repenting from our sins
4. Confessing our belief in Christ and
5. Being baptized in water for the remission of sins

Stating things in this way doesn’t change the doctrine of what is taught in the New Testament. It doesn’t omit anything from the word thus preserving its message. And, it doesn’t represent what anyone has done to make the Bible fit a particular perspective. This is the acid test that determines if someone is accurately teaching what the Bible says. Errors in the religious world lead to conflicts in the scriptures when certain doctrines or ideas are set forth as truth. If we accept what the Bible has to say then we’ll find ourselves preserving the message of the Gospel. So is there a plan? Yes, and it reveals itself when we listen to what the scriptures have to say for themselves.

7. But what about baptism ?

Most of the points I’ve made in the discussion of the plan of salvation won’t trigger any negative discussion until we reach the last one - baptism. What’s the big deal with baptism? Christians are often criticized as being obsessed with water baptism and the way it should be done. Some don’t believe its critical and even more believe that it doesn’t matter at all. Once more we need to take a close look at what the Bible has to say but before we do that we need to understand the word itself and why there’s so much confusion.

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In the early 1600's when the King James Version was translated there were quite a few controversies that arose over how things should be rendered. Some of the translators differed with the other translators and eventually compromises were made. One of those was over the nature of baptism. The original Greek word βαπτίζω meant to immerse or completely cover as in a burial. That presented a problem during the early 17th century because there were some who believed in the practice of infant baptism, which involved anointing a child's head with holy water, clinic baptism which was a form of sprinkling and others. The final decision was made not to translate the word at all. Instead the Greek characters were transliterated into English forms. While this settled the dispute at the time it has only helped to reinforce variations of baptism and their related doctrines, or the idea of no baptism at all. I could spend a lot of time going over these doctrines but its far more effective to take a look at what the scriptures say about baptism, not only as a command, but also statements about its purpose and reasons behind it.

Christ instructed his apostles, ***“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost...”*** (Matt 28.19). Mark records Christ's statements to his disciples as ***“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”*** (Mark 16.15-16). On the day of Pentecost we find the apostles teaching this as Peter told the multitude ***“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...”*** (Acts 2.38). We then find this repeated without exception in every example of conversion.

So if Christ commanded it, and the early Christians practiced it, what does it mean and what is it really for. Let's answer that from the scriptures.

Baptism is a figurative link between the believer and the death of Christ. In baptism we undergo a symbolic death in which we are put in contact with the blood of Christ, in a figurative manner, and our sins are taken away as God wipes them from his remembrance. Paul explains this very well in Romans chapter six.

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom 6.3-4). Note here the idea of not only being buried with Christ but the regeneration of the individual spiritually as a new creature, free from sin, enjoying a renewal of life without the weight of our past sins. There isn't anything magical taking place here in the act of being baptized. Peter explains this to us in his discussion of salvation.

Peter compares baptism to the flood during Noah's day in which the world was cleansed from evil. Peter details this comparison stating that it is ***“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...”*** (1 Pet 3.21). The thing

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to note here is that being baptized is an act of faith that tells God we're willing to submit to his authority in all things. Acting in faith God then recognizes the individual rendering obedience as his child and places us in the kingdom of his son which is the church as we read in **Acts 2.47**.

In a discussion of the fact that the old law had passed and the superiority of the Gospel Paul also indicates that baptism is that which identifies us as a follower of God. He states, "***For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.***" (**Gal 3.27-28**). Baptism is a defining moment that tells God that we're obedient to his conditions, submitting to his will, believing and placing faith in his son and the power of the resurrection and are thus putting on Christ. The opposite then also stands to be true. If one fails to submit to God in baptism with the proper belief they haven't put on Christ and aren't saved.

Another statement made by Paul to the Colossians tells us that it is at the point of being baptized that we have our sins taken away by God. "***In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.***" (**Col 2.11-12**).

Paul compares the removal of sin through baptism to the physical circumcision instituted during the life of Abraham and later incorporated into the Law. In this passage the circumcision made without hands refers to the removal of sin from one's soul which occurs when one obeys and is baptized. Simply put, if there's no baptism, then one's sins aren't removed, and therefore we aren't saved.

Let's summarize what baptism is and what it represents:

1. It is compliance with Christ's command (**Matt 28.19, Mk 16.15-16**)
2. It's a figurative burial in which believers join Christ in death (**Rom 6.3-4**)
3. It's a regeneration or renewal of life as one's sins are removed (**Rom 6.4**)
4. It's the answer of a good conscience - tells God we submit to his authority (**1 Pet 3.21**)
5. It is at that point that we are added to the church (**Acts 2.47**)
6. It is the way in which we put on Christ (**Gal 3.27**)

These are the scriptural statements concerning the importance of baptism. Any deviation from this pattern to either add something, such as being baptized for entry into a local body, or doctrines that assure people they're saved through faith alone, aren't scriptural and not recognized by God.

8. What about John 3.16?

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One of the most familiar and oft quoted biblical passages is **John 3.16**. This verse is a mainstay and proof text of doctrines that teach that one can be saved through simply believing and asking Christ to come into their heart as their personal lord and savior. Commonly referred to as the sinners prayer, its presented at funerals, church services and many other places. Those teaching and practicing this doctrine are some of the most devout and loving believers on the planet. But, there's a problem.

As we've seen in the discussion to this point, none of the examples of conversion included statements about anyone praying for redemption. The sinners prayer is not only not in the Bible, the idea creates a problem with passages that teach and demonstrate how one is saved. Proponents of this doctrine defend it and reject the idea of baptism as being necessary for salvation because that would be a work, and, they argue, we're saved by faith not works.

In order to fully understand **John 3.16**, the role of baptism, and the idea of being saved through faith we need to examine this passage carefully. In one of the early videos in this series I stated that context was critical in understanding passages and has to be preserved. When we take a look at beliefs regarding **John 3.16** we find that the context is not only violated but the true meaning of the passage is rejected. In order to fully realize the meaning of the verse we have to put it in its complete context. But first let's review what the verse actually says and work backward from there.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3.16). On the surface this verse appears to be simple and straightforward. God loved the world so much that he provided the final sacrifice for sin through his son, Jesus the Christ, and will save anyone who believes on him with the promise of eternal life.

When we compare this to Christ's statements in **Matt 28** and **Mark 16** we see that Jesus combined belief with baptism. As I've shown in the discussion to this point this was not only commanded by Christ but was taught and practiced by the early church. We have a conflict then between the interpretation of **John 3.16** and the statements of Christ, examples of conversion and every definitive statement about the relationship between baptism and salvation. Those who teach salvation through belief, or faith, argue aggressively against the idea that baptism is essential for salvation. One point that inevitably comes up is that John chapter three never mentions baptism. To those folks this reinforces the idea that baptism may be practiced but isn't necessary.

Here we turn to the context of the verse to understand why this idea is wrong. Verse sixteen is part of a longer conversation that began at the start of the chapter. In the opening verses we're introduced to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, who seeks an audience with Christ by night. Nicodemus has questions for Christ and these are the prelude to verse sixteen.

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First, Nicodemus realizes that Christ has been sent by God and states, “*for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him...*” (John 3.2). Christ’s response is interesting here. He states, “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” (John 3.3). John doesn’t record a question from Nicodemus about the coming kingdom so it may be that Christ knew what he was going to ask. If that’s the case then Jesus provides evidence that indeed he is from God.

Christ’s statement, that a man must be born again, is combined by some with the idea of being saved through accepting Christ and saying the sinner’s prayer. This doctrine teaches that when someone does this God cleanses them and they’re born again. That interpretation ignores the context in this case as we’ll see. Christ’s response presents a challenge for Nicodemus that will be answered as the conversation develops.

Nicodemus is confused and asks, “*How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*” (John 3.4). To him there doesn’t seem to be a connection between entering the kingdom of God and being born again. Christ often spoke figuratively and at times even his disciples were bewildered. Jesus clears up the confusion for Nicodemus by explaining what it means to be born again.

“*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*” (John 3.5). Jesus is being somewhat cryptic here and Nicodemus is given a lot that he’ll have to think about. We have the benefit of the complete revelation of the scriptures so it should be easier for us to put this together. In order to do that we have to take a look at the conversation and exactly what is being addressed.

1. First One who desires to see or enter the kingdom of God must be born again
2. Being born again means being born of the water and the spirit

How are these connected? Some say that the believer who is penitent can pray to God who then sends the spirit into the heart of the individual cleansing them from sin and therefore is born again. But something’s missing. Where’s the water? Not only that but how are water and the spirit connected?

Remember, Christ taught his disciples that they were to baptize those who believed. Those who believed responded to the word being taught. The word being taught was delivered by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. This is exactly what Peter taught on the day of Pentecost as he spoke to the multitude. The Spirit reveals that one is in need of obedience and through the word tells us what we need to do. When we respond to that, believing and having faith in God through Christ, one’s sins are taken away. As we discussed from Romans chapter six this was referred to as a “*newness of life*” or regeneration. These passages complement what is taught here in John three and does away with conflicts between other passages. We can add this thought to our summary.

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1. First One who desires to see or enter the kingdom of God must be born again
2. Being born again means being born of the water and the spirit
3. The Holy Spirit revealed the word which contains the knowledge we need
4. When one believes and obeys in faith they're baptized in water
5. When an individual renders obedience in this manner they're born again or a new creature in Christ

This is not only consistent with what Christ told his disciples to teach and do, but it also resolves conflicts with other passages about salvation. The final question leads us back to verse sixteen and so we can determine the connection.

Christ is aware that Nicodemus is a teacher of the Law and prophets which has prompted him to seek the Lord. As Jesus explains what he has just said he adds, "***Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?***" (John 3.10). Christ challenges Nicodemus's understanding of the prophets who wrote about the Messiah and his character. Christ is revealing himself to Nicodemus and continues to not only disclose his identity but he tells Nicodemus what is to happen.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3.14-15). Ok, if we stop here, and interpret these verses as some interpret verse sixteen, the conclusion has to be that believers must lift Christ up, or crucify him. We know that's not correct and can understand that what Jesus is telling this teacher of the Law is that he's going to be killed and this is the plan of God! Christ also specifies that the belief one needs to see the kingdom of God is therefore centered on the sacrifice of Christ and the promise of eternal life through faith in God's promise. Nicodemus is given detailed information here that will change the way he views the prophets. He'll understand that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and that through him one will be saved through their acceptance of him. Then we come to verse sixteen that really sheds light on this part of the conversation.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This isn't a formula for salvation. This is Christ's explanation to Nicodemus about why God sent him into the world and would allow him to be killed. To put it clearly, ***this isn't the plan of salvation***, it's Christ's ***definition of God's grace***. God has no obligation to save anyone. It's only through his love for mankind that he was willing to go to this length to provide the means by which we might be saved. So let's take a look at this conversation in context point by point:

1. One must be born again to enter the kingdom of God
2. Being born again involves the Holy Spirit and water
3. The Holy Spirit reveals the word which tells us what to do
4. Baptism is the water Christ referred to just as he did in **Matthew 28 & Mark 16**

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5. God provided Christ as a sacrifice because he loved mankind and desires to save

Putting things like this harmonizes the interpretation of **John 3.16** with every other scripture that deals with conversion and salvation. We also need to note some very important facts related to this discussion:

1. There are no examples in the New Testament of anyone being saved by belief & prayer
2. Nothing remotely like the sinners prayer is recorded or commanded
3. All examples of conversion ended with believers being baptized in water

9. What about faith and works

Finally a note about the rejection of baptism by some who believe faith alone saves. Baptism according to this view is a work, and one can't be saved by works. Correct? Well, yes and no. When we talk about works we don't imply that we're able to earn salvation or perform some deed that will obligate God to save us. There's nothing we can do to earn salvation. The provision for salvation, through Christ, is indeed a gift from God. As we turn to the scriptures we find that while the grace of God has been freely offered to all unconditionally, obedience is not without conditions. Let's take a look at what the Bible has to say about this.

What we need to realize is that we have to act, behave or work in such a way as to demonstrate we're willing to submit to God's authority. Those in the scriptures who are identified as faithful all did what God told them to do. Hebrews chapter eleven is a showcase of those who were faithful to God and they were recognized as being faithful because they did what God instructed them to do.

Abel offered the proper type of sacrifice (**Heb 11.4**). Enoch pleased God and was taken without seeing death (**Heb 11.5**). Noah followed God's directions to the letter in building the ark resulting in the salvation of his family (**Heb 11.7**). Abraham walked with God and left his own country trusting in the Lord's promises (**Heb 11.8-10**). And the list goes on. Moses was faithful in following the pattern by which the Tabernacle and everything related to worship were made and used (**Heb 8.5**).

Following God's directives didn't help them earn their salvation. They simply complied with the requirements of God for which they were rewarded by the Lord. We have to understand that the provision for salvation, the grace of God, is open to all nations but in order to access that we must do what God has commanded. That's the definition of being faithful. When God tells us to do something, we trust that he'll recognize and reward us if we obey. Salvation by baptism then isn't a work - its compliance with God's command, or as Peter stated - the answer of a good conscience toward God.

10. The last step

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We could spend a lot of time talking about all the beliefs that people have concerning salvation but I'll end this lesson and series with the last step that we have to follow to make it to Heaven. Christ told the Christians at the church in Smyrna "...***be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.***" (Rev 2.10). The challenge for us will be to remain faithful to God after conversion until our time comes to an end. There are some who teach that once we're saved we can't be lost but that's another idea the New Testament doesn't teach.

Paul told the Galatians who desired to return to the Law of Moses that by doing so they were fallen from grace in **Galatians 5.4**. Paul also stated that he brought himself under control "***lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.***" (1 Cor 9.27). If it was possible for Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to fail and be lost, it could happen to us. We need to have faith in God that by believing, placing our trust in him and determining to serve according to God's commands, not our ideas. God will be with us and when we sin, we can repent and be restored as Simon was in **Acts 8**. We only need to decide to follow what the scriptures teach. Its not hard to do and the reward is eternal.