

Perfected In Love: A Bible Study For All Seeking To Know God's Love

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Printed In The United States Of America

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus said, "*I, when I am lifted up...will draw all men to myself.*" (John 12:32)—My goal in writing this Bible study is to lift up Jesus so that you might know Him better. Whether you are Catholic, Protestant, or simply seeking to learn about Christianity, I pray that this study will open your eyes to how much the Lord truly loves you.

One of my all-time favorite hospice patients was an elderly gentleman by the name of Joe. He had a wonderful sense of humor, and over a period of several months we became very good friends. One day Joe asked what I believed about the forgiveness of sins. He told me what he had been taught. He was very frightened that he might screw things up and miss Heaven. He also dreaded the punishment which he felt was awaiting him on the other side of death. In short, he was terrified of God and the prospect of death was something to be dreaded, unlike the apostle Paul who couldn't wait to get to Heaven. Paul said, "*For me to live is Christ and to die is gain . . . I desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better.*" (Philippians 1:21,23)

Rather than state my own personal beliefs, I asked Joe if I could read some Bible verses to him about salvation, forgiveness and the whole concept of punishment after death. He said that was fine. One of the key passages was I John 4:16-18 which says, "*God is love...Perfect love casts out fear because fear has to do with punishment and the one who fears is not **perfected in love.***" (emphasis mine). I then jotted down numerous other verses for him to read from his Bible dealing with God's love and forgiveness. That week he very diligently looked up the verses in his own Bible. (As I recall, some of the verses were: I John 1:9; I John 5:11-13; Romans 8:1; Ephesians 2:8,9, Romans 3:21-4:8; 10:8-11; Galatians 3:1-11; Hebrews 2:14,15; and John 3:16-18.)

Over the next few months, Joe began to ask me many similar questions. I would never debate him, and I showed utmost respect for his beliefs. Each week I would jot down Bible passages which addressed the questions he raised. He'd look them up and we would discuss them the following week. Finally, after several weeks of doing this, he said, "*Do you know that what you're showing me contradicts virtually everything I've ever*

been taught?!”

I never put pressure on Joe to leave his denomination. When he died, I was one of two people to give the eulogy at his funeral. Based on his study of the Bible, Joe recommitted his life to Jesus Christ before he died. He seemed to die at peace. His fears had subsided as he began learning about God’s *perfect love*.

Speaking as a chaplain, friend, and a fellow brother in Christ, there are several reasons I urge you to simply see what the Bible has to say about your eternal destiny. I am deeply grieved by the number of patients and dear friends I have, who, like Joe, are living spiritually fear-based, guilt-driven lives. I don’t mean to be judgmental, but in my seventeen plus years as a hospice chaplain, I have worked with well over two thousand patients who have died. Speaking from firsthand experience I can tell you that what a person believes about God and Heaven has a direct impact on how they die. My heart aches when I see these patients living under such a cloud of spiritual doubt and fear. The writer of Hebrews tells us Christ died that we might be “*delivered from our slavery to the fear of death.*” (Hebrews 2:14,15)

Most denominations are in agreement that salvation is only found in Christ. The apostle Peter said, “*Salvation is found in **no one else**, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*” (Acts 4:12) Jesus said, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through **Me**.*” (John 14:6) In John 17:3 Jesus said, “*Now this is eternal life; that they may **know** You, the only true **God and Jesus Christ**, whom You have sent.*” In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus said, “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven...Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never **knew** you...’*”—Knowing Christ personally is everything.

So, how do we get to know Christ?

Consistently, throughout Jesus’ life, He and the other Bible writers emphasized the Word of God as the main means whereby we get to know God and are sanctified (set apart and made holy). The night before Jesus was crucified, He prayed: “*Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.*” (John 17:17).

Paul, in writing to his young disciple, Timothy, said, “. . . *from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*” (II Timothy 3:15. See also: II Peter 3:14-18 and Hebrews 4:12.) Understanding God’s Word is foundational to truly knowing Christ.

Once Jesus’ mother, Mary, and Jesus’ brothers came to take Him away because they thought He was “*out of his mind*” (Mark 3:21). Jesus ignored Mary and His brothers and told His disciples, “*My mother and brothers and sisters are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.*” (Mark 3:31-35).

On another occasion, as Paul preached in the city of Berea, the Bible says, “*Now these [the Bereans] were more noble minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.*” (Acts 17:11)

My prayer and challenge is for you to simply examine the scriptures for yourself to find out what they say. Over the next few days, weeks or months I ask you set aside a little bit of time each day to simply read and study the Bible.

Establishing a love-relationship with Christ, and knowing His Word, should be top priority for all who profess to be Christians. You cannot delegate this responsibility to anyone else. It is between you and the Lord. (Responsibility is one thing in life we can never delegate.)

When we stand before God on the day of judgment, knowing Him, and having lived our lives in harmony with the truth of His Word, will mean everything. How sad it would be to stand before God, only to discover that much of what we believed was based on half-truths or a lack of understanding. “*Oops*” is one word we don’t want to say after we die! Until you examine the Bible for yourself, you will never know for sure who or what to believe. We’ve all known people who are sincere, but sincerely wrong. May we not be one of them.

On most topics the Bible speaks with incredible clarity. You certainly don’t need me telling you what to believe, or what not to believe. Therefore, as much as possible, I will attempt to step out of the way and allow you to discover on your own what the Bible teaches. In this study I have taken what is called the *inductive approach*. In other words, I will simply ask questions and direct you to scripture passages which specifically answer those questions. It will then be up to you to dig out the answers on your own. **In other words, I will not answer these questions for you. Whether you modify any of your beliefs will be between you and God. The Bible is your friend, a Heavenly love letter from God.** The verses you look up in the Bible should be no threat

whatsoever. They are like a carpenter's plumb line to let us know if what we believe squares with the truth, or whether our beliefs are a bit out of plumb. Rest assured, I will not ask you any question(s) that violates or encourages you to go against God's Word. Paul said that we are to *test all things, and hold fast that which is true* (I Thessalonians 5:21). It is *not* a sin to read the Bible and ask questions.

SIX QUESTIONS WHICH COULD CHANGE YOUR LIFE:

As a little trial run to see if this study is right for you, will you take 10-15 minutes and simply answer these six questions? You may be very pleasantly surprised by what you discover. My prayer is that once you answer these, you will see the need to complete the rest of this study. Listen to your heart. Use your mind. Allow God's Holy Spirit to speak to you. Have the courage to honestly seek the Lord and His truth.

1. What difference would it make in your life, right now, if you truly believed in your heart-of-hearts that God loved you and sees you as His *beloved* child? That is what the Bible says.—Read: Ephesians 5:1.
2. What if you could *know* for sure that when you die you were going to Heaven? How would that impact your life? Would you feel a greater sense of peace and tranquility? Actually, the Bible says you can *know* that you are going to Heaven.—Read: I John 5:11-13 (Especially notice verse 13.)
3. How would you feel if you knew for certain that *all* your sins were forgiven (past, present and future), and that your sins would *never* be counted against you? The Bible says you can have this assurance.—Read: Psalm 103:11,12; Romans 4:7,8; 5:8; and I John 1:9.
4. How would your relationship with God be affected if you truly believed that God did not have one condemning thought toward you, that Christ bore *all* your sins on the cross? If Christ is your Savior, the Bible says there is *no condemnation* for you.—Read: Romans 8:1.
5. Try to visualize and feel what it would be like if you could stand before God when you die with absolutely no fear of punishment.—Read: I John 4:16-18 and Hebrews 2:14,15.
6. When you die, what if you could come before God with *exceeding joy, without any fault*, because you are totally loved and 100% forgiven? Do you realize that this is exactly what the Bible says God desires for you?— Read: Jude 1:24,25 (cf., Luke 16:11-24)

Did these verses surprise you? If they did, then you're probably in for many more surprises. Thankfully, *being uninformed about God's Word is very curable*. You owe it to yourself to learn what a precious gift God has given you in the Bible. You wouldn't think of receiving a Christmas present you didn't open. The Bible is God's gift to you. Won't you open it?

Use any translation of the Bible you choose, preferably a modern translation since they are so much easier to understand. With very few exceptions, Catholic and Protestant translations are virtually identical except for the addition of the *Apocrypha*, the historical books written between the Old and New Testaments. A helpful way to reinforce and remember what you study is to write down your answers and thoughts in this booklet, or in a notebook. Use a colored pen, pencil or highlighter, to mark key verses in your Bible which you wish to remember. It will make them much easier to find in the future.

I strongly recommend that each time you look up a verse that you take time to read the Bible verses surrounding it. That way you will clearly see each verse in context. As someone said, "*A verse out of context is only a pretext.*"

Maybe this is your first time to actually read the Bible for yourself. What an exciting journey to begin! Few things will impact your eternal future more than knowing the Bible. Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit, who lives in all true believers, is able to guide us into all truth (John 14:15-17,26). It is Satan who seeks to steal the Word of God from our hearts. (Luke 8:11,12) Therefore, will you take a minute right now and ask God to open your

eyes and protect you from all deception? This is why studying the Bible is so exciting. It is a way for you to actually encounter and partner with the living God.

Reading the Bible is not just about gathering head data. The Bible is a *living* book. The writer of Hebrews says that the Word of God is “...*living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*” (Hebrews 4:12). There is a closeness and depth with God that can *only* come through encountering Him in His life-giving Word.

Joy is one of the things which Jesus longs for His followers to have, a joy which grows out of knowing how much we are loved by Him. (See: John 15:10,11.) If you have been living a fear-based life, terrified of the Lord, ever doubting His love for you, then I believe the Lord wants to set you free to truly know and rest in His love. Jesus said, “*If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*” (John 8:36) He longs for you to know His abiding love, presence and joy. (See: John 16:33; 17:26.) Why not make that a major goal as you do this Bible study?

Let the journey begin!

I. KNOWING THE LOVE OF CHRIST

[Please look up each verse and jot your answers down in the space provided, or write your answers in a journal or notebook.]

According to the Bible, how much does God love you?

I John 3:1,2

I John 4:16-18

John 15:9-17

How far was God willing to go to show you His love?

John 3:16 (cf., Philippians 2:5-11)

What price was paid for your salvation? How valuable does that make you?

Romans 5:8

Can anything ever separate you from the love of God?

Romans 8:31-39

Who lovingly longs to comfort you when you are down and going through hard times?

II Corinthians 1:3-5

Who identifies with you when you suffer? Who can you turn to for comfort and guidance?

II Corinthians 1:5-7

Hebrews 4:14-16

Who knows all about your fears and anxieties and loves you anyway?

I Peter 5:7

There are two in Heaven who lovingly intercede and pray for you. Who are they? Have you asked them to pray for you?

Romans 8:26

Romans 8:34 (c.f., Hebrews 7:25)

Who loves you so much that He has even numbered the very hairs on your head?

Luke 12:7

Who has come to give you an abundant life?

John 10:10

When the Lord disciplines you, what is His motivation?

Hebrews 12:7-11 (cf. Revelation 3:19)

Who lovingly longs to be your provider?

Philippians 4:19

Matthew 6:25-34

Who desires to strengthen you when you are feeling weak and helpless?

II Corinthians 12:8-10

Philippians 4:13

Who longs to be your security as you face the trials of this world?

John 15:5

Ephesians 3:14-19 (note the words “rooted and grounded”)

II Timothy 4:18

Who is the *author and the perfecter* of your faith? What do those words mean?

Hebrews 12:1,2

Is it alright to pray directly to Jesus?

Acts 7:59,60

Acts 8:24

I Corinthians 1:2

II Corinthians 12:8,9

Hebrews 4:14-16

On whom are you to fix your eyes and follow with all your heart?

John 10:3-5

Acts 2:25

Hebrews 12:2

Who longs to be your protector?

II Thessalonians 3:3-5

Who longs to be your friend?

John 15:15

Who are you to turn to when the burdens of this life get too heavy?

Matthew 11:28-30

Who lovingly calls you to be *one* with Himself?

John 17:20-23

Who loves you so much, that when you die, He wants you to live with Him forever?

John 14:1,2

Who lovingly invites you to share in His eternal joy and glory?

John 17:22-24

Romans 8:18-25

I Corinthians 2:9 (cf., Psalm 16:11)

Who longs to bless you with *all things*, now and eternally?

I Corinthians 3:21-23 (note the present tense verbs)

Galatians 4:4-7

Ephesians 1:3

To whom are you invited to be married in a spiritual love relation-ship throughout all eternity?

Ephesians 5:31,32

What is one secret to being *filled to all the fullness of God*? Is it based on how much you love God, or does God's fullness come as you begin to comprehend how much He loves you? (Please read carefully. The answer may surprise you!)

Ephesians 3:14-19

To whom are you to turn in order to find inner peace and joy?

John 14:27

Galatians 5:22,23

Ephesians 2:14

How would you summarize what the Lord has just shown you about His love? Please take some time to pray and thank Him. Ask Him to make His love real to you.

II. LEARNING ABOUT JESUS

In what ways was Jesus able to heal?

Mark 5:24-43

In what ways does Jesus long to be gentle with you?

Matthew 11:28, 29

Matthew 21:5

How is Jesus reigning in power right now?

Matthew 24:30

Ephesians 3:20

Revelation 1:5, 18

Revelation 4:11

Revelation 5:12

How does Christ demonstrate His power and authority over Satan?

Ephesians 1:19-23 (cf., 6:10-18)

Who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings?

Revelation 19:16

Is Christ the eternal God-become-man?

John 1:1,14

John 8:58

Philippians 2:6-11

Who is the bread of life? What does that mean?

John 6:33, 35, 58

Who is the water of life? How is knowing Jesus like *living water*?

John 4:10-14 (cf., 7:37-39)

Who longs to shepherd you when you feel lost?

John 10:10-15 (cf., Isaiah 40:11, a Messianic passage)

Who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end?

Revelation 1:17,18; 2:8; 22:12-20 (cf. Revelation 1:8)

What warning does the Bible give about honoring anyone or anything before the Lord?

Isaiah 42:8

Isaiah 48:11

Luke 14:26,27

1 Corinthians 8:6

Are we permitted to worship anyone other than God?

Matthew 4:10 (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-6; 13,14)

Colossians 2:18

Revelation 19:10; 22:8,9

If only God is to be worshiped, is it OK to worship Jesus?

John 9:38

Matthew 14:33

Matthew 28:9,17

Hebrews 1:6-8 (Note: in verse 8, Christ, as *Son*, is called *God*.)

Is Jesus co-creator of the world? What are the implications?

John 1:2,3,10

Colossians 1:16-18

Hebrews 1:1,2

Who is the source and provider of all spiritual gifts?

Ephesians 1:3

I Corinthians 12:11,18 (cf. 1:3-5)

In whom do you live and move and have your being?

Acts 17:28

Romans 11:36

In whom are fulfilled all of the promises of God?

II Corinthians 1:19

Whose name is above all other names?

Philippians 2:9-11

At whose feet will you one day bow?

Philippians 2:10-11

In Heaven, who was the only one considered worthy to open the scroll with the seven seals? (The seven seals contain all of the judgments on the world during the coming Great Tribulation on earth.)

Revelation 5:1-10

Who longs to fill you with His presence?

Ephesians 4:7-10; 5:18

Who is all-powerful?

Isaiah 40:10-31 (cf. 45:5-13)

Matthew 28:18

Hebrews 1:3 (cf. Luke 8:25)

III. GOD'S WONDERFUL SALVATION.

Who redeemed (bought back) your life, making salvation possible?

Hebrews 9:12

When you were helpless, dead in your sins, who came to rescue you?

Ephesians 2:3-9

Philippians 2:6,7

Who longs to live in your heart as your Lord and Savior?

Romans 8:9-11

Galatians 2:20

Revelation 3:20

Who is kind and merciful to you when you sin?

Romans 2:4

Hebrews 2:17

There is only One you must *know* to go to Heaven. Who?

Matthew 7:21-23

John 14:6; 17:2,3

Acts 4:12 (This is a very key verse for all who profess to be Christians.)

Who alone can forgive you when you sin?

Psalms 103:1-12

Mark 2:5-11

Luke 7:36-50

Ephesians 1:3-8

I John 1:9

Who bore our sins and redeemed (purchased) us? How?

Isaiah 53:6

Acts 4:12

Romans 5:9-11

Ephesians 1:7 (cf., 2:18)

(For additional verses on this topic see: I Corinthians 6:11; Colossians 1:13,14, 20; I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:14-16; Hebrews 9:14,15; Hebrews 10:11-18; I Peter 1:18,19 and I Peter 3:18.)

In the New Testament, through whom does grace come?

John 1:17

Romans 1:5, 7

Romans 3:24-26

Romans 5:2, 17, 21

I Corinthians 1:3-5

II Timothy 1:2, 8-10

(For further study, read: Hebrews 4:14-16; James 1:17; I Thessalonians 1:2-10; II Thessalonians 1:12; I Timothy 1:2,14; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3, II John 1:3 and Revelation 22:21.)

When you receive salvation, does God forgive *all* your sins?

Past: Ephesians. 2:1-9; II Timothy 1:9

Present: Romans 6:15-22; Titus 3:5, Revelation 1:5

Future: Romans 5:9,10; I Thessalonians 5:8,9

In your daily walk with God, when you sin and blow it, who defends you against Satan's accusations before God?

I John 2:1,2 (An *advocate* means *defense attorney*.)

Who is the one and only true mediator between you and God?

I Timothy 2:5

Hebrews 7:25

To illustrate God's ability to forgive all sins (even abortion), three well known men in the Bible were guilty of murder, or consenting to murder. Who were they? Were each of these men forgiven by God and did God go on to use them in mighty ways?

Exodus 2:11,12 (Compare with Deuteronomy 34:1-12)

II Samuel 12:1-13 (Compare with Psalm 32:1-7)

Acts 7:59-8:1; 9:1,2 (Compare with I Timothy 1:12-16)

If we commit one sin, is that the same as breaking *all* of God's laws?

James 2:10

How many sins does it take to bring about separation from God?

Genesis 2:17

Romans 5:18 (cf., 6:23)

Can God's forgiveness and salvation ever be purchased with money?

Micah 3:11-12

Matthew 10:8,9

Acts 8:9-20 (note verse 20...compare with Ephesians 2:8,9)

Revelation 22:17

When we become Christians, we are called to *repent*. What does repentance involve?

II Chronicles 7:14

Psalm 34:14-18

Hosea 14:1-3

Matthew 3:2-8; 4:17

Luke 13:3-5 (cf., 15:7)

Acts 3:19 (cf. Acts 2:21,38-40; I John 1:9)

Acts 17:30,31

II Corinthians 7:8-10

Revelation 3:1-3,19,20

Who maintains and protects our salvation?

I Corinthians 1:8,9

Philippians 1:6 (Note God's role in our lives.)

I Peter 1:3-5

Jude 1:24,25

Is God's grace based on anything we do, earn or merit?

Romans 3:20-28 (Read chapters 3-5 for a comprehensive overview.)

Romans 4:1-8

Romans 9:30-32

Romans 11:5,6

Galatians 2:16; 3:1-14, 22-24 (Note Paul's reasoning.)

Ephesians 2:8,9

(Additionally see: John 5:28,29; 17:2,3; Romans 10:2-13; I Corinthians 2:12; Galatians 2:16-21; II Timothy 1:8,9; Titus 3:5-8.)

Here are three passages where Jesus spoke of forgiveness and salvation. Were good works a prerequisite for their salvation?

Mark 10:15,16

Luke 15:11-24

Luke 23:40-43

How much did it cost the Father to purchase your salvation?

John 3:16

Ephesians 1:7,8

Hebrews 10:10

What cleanses and frees us from our sin?

Romans 5:8,9

Hebrews 10:19

I Peter 1:18,19

Revelation 1:5b

In what way is God's salvation a *gift*? If you receive God's gift, must you work to earn/merit it? What does the apostle Paul say?

Romans 4:1-8

Romans 11:29 (What does *irrevocable* mean?)

I Corinthians 4:7

Galatians 3:1-14

According to scripture, what must you *do* to obtain salvation?

John 1:12 (What are the two key words in this verse?)

John 3:16-18 (How does this answer Jesus's statement in verse 3?)

Acts 16:29-34 (What is the key word pertaining to salvation? After believing, what outward act did they do to show their commitment?)

Romans 1:16,17 (What one word is key to the gospel?)

Romans 3:21-28 (Who or what is the object of our faith?)

Romans 5:1,2 (What is the key which gives us access to God?)

Romans 10:9 (What two important things are we told to do?)

Romans 10:10-13 (How do these verses explain verse 9?)

Once you believe in Christ, who comes to live in you as a guarantee that you really are a Christian?

II Corinthians 1:22; 5:5

Ephesians 1:13

Why is salvation a gift?

Romans 4:2-5

Ephesians 2:8,9 (cf., Acts 15:9-11)

There is one main passage in the New Testament, James 2:14-24, which speaks of *faith without works being dead*. Some theologians argue that we must *work* to maintain our salvation and be *justified* (forgiven). The following questions may help clarify what James meant when he refers to Abraham being *justified by works*.

1. What question was James trying to answer when he spoke of works? In other words, what is the context of this passage?

James 2:14 (Note the sign of true believing faith.)

2. According to Paul, when did Abraham receive salvation and enter into a covenant with God?

Romans 4:1-16 (cf., Genesis 12:1-8; 15:1-6)

3. Was Abraham's salvation dependent on his good works?

Romans 4:1-4 (Read the rest of the chapter for even more insight.)

[Historical note: When God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham had been a believer for 35-45 years. We know this because Isaac was born 25 years after God established His covenant with Abraham. (Compare:

Genesis 12:4 with 21:5.) Since Isaac was probably 10-20 years old when Abraham was asked to sacrifice him, it means that Abraham had probably been following the Lord between 35-45 years. He already had a long history of walking with God, as recorded in Genesis, chapters 12-21.]

4. Therefore, when James says Abraham was *justified by works*, does James mean that Abraham did not have salvation until he was *justified* by offering Isaac many years after coming to faith? Or, does it make more sense to interpret the word *justified*, in this context, as meaning *authenticated or proved*? (Note: Sometimes the same word can have two meanings, just as many of our English words have more than one meaning. For example: compare I Timothy 2:15 with Ephesians 2:8.) How does Romans 4:1-8 shed light on James 2:14?

5. If good works are not necessary for salvation, are they still an indication that true salvation has occurred? Can the Holy Spirit come to live within a person, as a result of salvation, and yet there be no *good works* to show for it? Can genuine salvation occur without being followed by good works? Compare James 2:14-24 with the following verses:

Matthew 3:8

Matthew 13:8,23

John 8:31,32

John 12:24

John 15:2,5-8

Galatians 5:22,23

Ephesians 2:10

6. While good works are important, what should be the primary motivation behind all we do?

I Corinthians 13:1-3 (See also: I Peter 4:8; I John 4:7 and Revelation 2:1-4.)

IV: RECEIVING GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION

I was visiting with a hospice patient. She told me that she feared she wasn't "*good enough to go to Heaven.*" I said, "*You're not.*" Her eyes got as big as saucers. I then said, "*That's why we need a Savior.*" I then told her the story about the brother and sister who had gotten their school pictures. The sister complained to her brother, "*These pictures don't do me justice.*" Her brother replied, "*You don't want justice. You want mercy!*" We laughed, but the point was made. I can't speak for you, but when I stand before God, I need His grace and mercy, *not* His justice. As you have done this study, I trust you have come to see the importance of receiving God's grace, mercy and forgiveness in Christ. If you feel a need to recommit your life to Christ, based on what you have learned thus far from God's Word, may I encourage you to simply, humbly, write a prayer from your heart to the Lord. Find a quiet spot and then earnestly pray it to Him. May I suggest the following steps?

1. Acknowledge that Jesus loves you, that He died for *all* your sins and was resurrected.

John 3:16

Romans 5:8

I Corinthians 15:3,4].

2. Confess your sins to Him, and claim his promised forgiveness.

Romans 10:9-13

I John 1:9

Psalm 103:3-12

3. If you haven't already done so, invite Him into your heart, to live within you, to be the Lord of your life.

John 1:12

Galatians 2:20

Revelation 3:20

4. Thank Him for the promised Holy Spirit who will live in you.

I Corinthians 12:13

II Corinthians 5:5

Ephesians 1:13,14

5. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your life in all you do.

Romans 8:9

6. Ask that you be made a new person from the inside out.

II Corinthians 5:17

How can you have confidence that God will indeed hear and answer your prayer of commitment? Reflect on these two questions:

1. Is it God's will for you to be saved (receive salvation)?

II Peter 3:9

2. What promise does God give you if you pray and ask for anything that is according to His will (e.g., that you be saved)?

I John 5:13-15

The Bible says, “*Now is the day of salvation.*” (II Corinthians 6:2). Can you think of any reason not to invite Christ into your heart right *now*? There is an old proverb which says that *a journey of a thousand miles*

begins with a single step. Won't you take that step now? The Lord promises to save all who call upon His name. (Romans 10:13). Based on what you've been reading and studying, will you write out your prayer of commitment here?

MY PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

My Name_____ Today's date_____

(This is an important day to remember, much like your birthday.)

V. GROWING AS A CHRISTIAN

Once you are truly a believer, the Bible gives many wonderful promises. If you are truly saved, and are sealed with God's Holy Spirit, is your salvation secure in Christ? What promises does scripture give? [Be sure to read each verse in context.] There are many verses in this section. Take your time and reflect on each.

John 3:16 (Does eternal life begin the moment you truly *believe*?)

John 5:24 (Is there any part of this verse which is conditional?)

John 6:37,39, 44,45 (Who initiates and draws you to salvation? Will He ever lose you?)

John 10:27-30 (Is anything or anyone stronger than God?)

John 11:25,26 (Is this a true statement of fact?)

John 15:16 (Does Jesus ever make a mistake and choose wrong?)

John 17:11,12 (Who protects your salvation? What does *lose none* mean?—cf., John 18:9)

Acts 13:46-48 (Note one's personal responsibility in verse 46 and God's sovereign choice in verse 48.)

Romans 5:9-11 (What are we be saved from?)

Romans 8:11,29,30 (Note how the meaning of verse 30 would change if you inserted the word, "some" into the verse. What if it read, "*Some* of those he predestined he called, and *some* of those he called he justified, and *some* of those God justified he glorified?"—Is that how this verse reads?)

Romans 8:38,39 (While God loves all, to whom is this addressed?)

Romans 10:9-13 (If genuine belief and salvation occurs, what promise is given? Does it say "we might be saved *if*..."?)

Romans 11:29b (What does Paul say is *irrevocable*? How does this verse relate back to God's calling in Roman 8:30?)

I Corinthians 1:8,9 (Note: The Corinthians were not very godly, yet notice what Paul says about them in these verses.)

I Corinthians 3:12-15 (When Christians sin and fail to do many good works, what do they lose? Do they lose their salvation?)

I Corinthians 5:1-5 (What was the outcome of this Christian caught in gross sin? Did he lose his salvation?)

I Corinthians 11:27-32 (Note what happens to these Christians living in sin. Did they lose their salvation?)

II Corinthians 1:21,22 (cf., 5:1-5. What are we *guaranteed*?)

Ephesians 1:5,11-14 (Note God's purpose in salvation.)

Ephesians 4:30 (Does mortal man have the power to break that which God seals? cf., John 10:28.)

Hebrews 6:11 (What is a *sure hope*? Note, this immediately follows a passage used by some to say we can lose our salvation: See: verses 4-6. Do those verses relate to true believers? See verse 9.)

Hebrews 7:25 (cf., Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 9:24—Just how effective are Christ's prayers and intercession? Does God ever say "*No*" to any of the Son's requests?)

Hebrews 10:10 (What do the word "*once for all*" mean?)

Hebrews 10:19-23 (What do the words: *confidence*, *full assurance*, and *promised* mean?)

II Timothy 1:12; 4:18 (Who guards and protects our salvation?)

Titus 3:4-7 (What did we *do* to earn our salvation?)

I Peter 1:3-5 (What do the words *never spoil*, *kept*, *shielded* mean?)

I John 3:6-10 (Note: In verse 9 the Greek word "*cannot*" does not mean *impossible*. Rather it is like a doctor telling a patient, "You *cannot* keep on smoking or you'll die." The same Greek word for *cannot* is also used in I Corinthians 10:21.)

I John 5:11-13 (Note the word *know* in verse 13.)

I John 5:18-20 (Who keeps us safe?)

II John 1:8 (By sinning, what does a Christian stand to lose?)

Jude 1:24 [What does *keep you from falling* mean?)

Based on Luke 8:13; I Corinthians 9:25-27; 10:12; Romans 11:13-22; Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-31; II Peter 2:20,21, and several other passages, some argue that true, born again Christians can lose their salvation. While I personally disagree with this position, many sincere Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, believe otherwise. According to the Law of Non-contradiction in logic, both viewpoints cannot be true. For the opposing view to be true, all of the verses you've just looked at would have to be re-explained or dismissed.

What explanation does John give concerning those who fall away from the faith? According to him, were they ever truly saved?

I John 2:19 (cf. Matthew 7:23...note the word "*never*")

What strong warning does Paul give to those who casually assume they are saved but are not?

I Corinthians 9:27 (cf. I Corinthians 3:11-15; Philippians 3:13-15)

II Corinthians 13:5 (Were some only fooling themselves?)

Some say, "*I'm saved. I'm under grace. Therefore, I can sin and do whatever I want.*" As Christians do we have a license to sin? What strong warnings does scripture give? (Theologically, this particular heresy is known as *antinomianism*.)

Romans 6:1-7

I Corinthians 6:9-11

Colossians 1:21-23 (Do true believers persevere?)

Hebrews 10:19-30

I John 3:6-10

Two of the most used phrases in the New Testament are the phrases “*in Christ*” or “*in Him*.” When you receive Christ into your life, the Bible says you are placed “*in Christ*.” (I Corinthians 1:30) What are some of the wonderful blessings and assurances that come with being “*in Christ*?” (Because there are so many verses in this section, you may wish to break this section up a bit by only looking up 5-10 verses at a time and then meditate on them. May you find joy in these incredible truths.)

Romans 6:8-11

Romans 6:23

Romans 8:1

Romans 8:39

Romans 12:5

I Corinthians 1:2

I Corinthians 1:30 [Note who places you “*in Christ*.”]

I Corinthians 15:22

II Corinthians 1:20-22

II Corinthians 3:14

II Corinthians 5:17-19

Galatians 2:4

Galatians 2:16, 17

Galatians 5:6 (What really counts if you are a Christian?)

Ephesians 1:3 (Note: Is this blessing present tense or future tense?)

Ephesians 1:9

Ephesians 1:12, 13

Ephesians 2:3-6

Ephesians 2:7-9

Ephesians 2:10 (How does this give you hope for the future?)

Ephesians 2:13 (To whom are we brought near?)

Ephesians 3:11

Ephesians 4:32

Philippians 3:9

Philippians 3:13-15

Philippians 4:6,7

Philippians 4:19

Colossians 1:28

Colossians 2:10

I Thessalonians 5:18

I Timothy 1:14

I Timothy 3:13

II Timothy 1:9

II Timothy 2:10

II Timothy 3:12

Philemon 1:6

I Peter 5:10

If you have truly come to know the love of Christ and His forgiveness, what are you called to do?

John 14:15

Romans 6:16

Hebrews 5:9

Hebrews 10:35-39

I John 2:3

What else does the Bible say you are to do?

Matthew 28:18-20

Acts 1:8

Philippians 1:27-30

II Timothy 1:8; 2:1

I Peter 3:15,16

What does the Bible say about trying to be righteous (holy) in your own strength?

Romans 10:3

Galatians 3:1-14 (cf., 2:21)

Philippians 3:6-9

Where does your righteousness come from? How is it granted?

Romans 1:17 (cf., 4:18-25)

Romans 5:17

Galatians 3:1-6,11,14

Philippians 1:9-11

Growing as a Christian is extremely important. There are at least three main ways to grow and mature as Christians. What are they:

1. Hebrews 10:24,25 (cf., Ephesians 4:11,12)

2. I Thessalonians 5:17,18 (cf. Philippians 4:6,7)

3. John 17:17

What role should the Bible play in your life as a believer?

Psalm 119:9-16, 105

Matthew 13:18-23 (What did Satan steal? What was the seed?)

Acts 17:11

I Corinthians 4:6

II Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17

(For further study, read: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 19:7-11; Hebrews 5:11-16; II Peter 3:15-18 and I John 2:5.)

Why should you read and study the Bible daily?

Psalm 119:9,11,152

Isaiah 50:4

Isaiah 55:6-11

John 17:8,14-17

II Timothy 3:12- 4:4

I Peter 1:25-2:3

II Peter 3:11-18

Did Jesus and the apostles teach that there would be an infallible church, along with infallible Christians?

Matthew 7:15-20

Acts 20:29-31

Romans 16:18

Galatians 2:11-21 (Note the moral issues and who was involved.)

I Timothy 4:1-3

II Peter 2:1

Revelation, chapters 2 and 3 (Were all of the 7 churches infallible?)

(For additional verses read: II Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 4:14; Titus 1:10,11; I John 4:1 and II John 1:7-9.)

What is our one infallible guide for knowing and testing *truth*?

Matthew 15:6; 22:29

John 17:17

Acts 17:11

II Timothy 3:14-17

II Peter 1:3

II Pet. 3:17,18

Hebrews. 4:12

Is *sincerity* an accurate gauge of truth? Can we be sincerely wrong?

Hosea 4:6

Romans 10:2 (What were these people lacking?)

II Timothy 2:15

Why are we encouraged to question what we have been taught?

Acts 17:11

I Thessalonians 5:21

II Timothy 2:7

Revelation 2:2

Can we interpret scripture for ourselves with the Spirit's help?

John 14:16,17, 25,26

I Corinthians 2:12-16 (While this passages speaks to the individual, it must also be noted that Paul's letter would have been read in a corporate setting. We need one another to help know truth.)

I John 2:7

Does anyone have the right to change, alter, or add to scripture?

Jude 1:3 (Note the words "*once for all.*")

II Peter 1:19-21

Revelation 22:18,19

What strong warnings does scripture give to any individual or group who tries to change, alter or add to the *gospel* of Christ?

Acts 20:27-31

Galatians 1:6-9

II Peter 2:1

How would you summarize what God has just shown you?

VI. APPLYING GOD'S WORD

How are we as believers to address and relate to one another?

John 13:35

Matthew 23:1-12

What was the common title by which all Christian were called?

Romans 1:7

II Corinthians 1:1

Ephesians 1:1

Philippians 1:1

Who will be your judge on the final day of judgment?

John 5:21,22

When you die, if you know Christ, does there seem to be more punishment and purging awaiting us after death?

Romans 4:7,8 (See also: Psalm 103:3-12 and Romans 8:1.)

Hebrews 2:14,15

I John 3:1-3

I John 4:16-18

Jude 24,25

Based on these biblical accounts of other believers who died, what should you expect after you die?

Psalm 23:4-6

Psalm 73:21-26

Luke 16:19-31; 23:43

Acts 7:55-59

Romans 4:7,8

Romans 8:1,15

II Corinthians 5:6-8 (Note where the believer goes after death.)

Philippians 1:21-26 (Note where the believer goes after death.)

II Peter 1:11

I John 4:16-18 (Should we fear punishment after death?)

Jude 1:24,25 (Because of Jesus's work on the cross, how are we able to come before God?)

Besides confessing our sins to God (Romans 10:9-13; I John 1:9), to whom are we told to confess our sins?

Does it say we confess to one another in order to be *forgiven*, or do we confess in order to be *healed* (emotionally and physically)?

Galatians 6:1-3

James 5:13-16

What are we called to faithfully do for one another?

Romans 15:30,31

II Corinthians 1:11; 9:14

Ephesians 1:15-21; 3:16-19; 6:19

Philippians 1:3-9

Colossians 4:2-4

(See also: I Thessalonians 1:2,3; II Timothy 1:3; Hebrews 13:18,19
James 5:14-16.)

When you pray, how and to whom are you to pray?

Matthew 6:1-18 (Note the clear instructions on praying.)

John 14:11-14

John 15:7

In whose name are you to pray?

John 14:13

I Corinthians 1:2

How are you clearly told *not* to pray?

Matthew 6:5-8

Isaiah 8:19 (This answers the question to whom we should pray.)

Who is our only Savior?

Isaiah 43:11

John 1:29; 4:42

Matthew 1:21 (cf., John 4:42; Luke 2:11)

I Timothy 4:10

Titus 2:13 (In Titus 1:4; 2:10,13 and 3:4,6, note how Jesus and the Father co-equally share the same title of *Savior*.)

Who redeems us from our sin?

Isaiah 44:6

Galatians 4:5

Titus 2:14

According to Jesus, who was the greatest person ever born?

Matthew 11:11

What freedom do all believers have concerning marriage?

Matthew 8:14,15

I Corinthians 7:1-9, 25-28, 37,38

I Corinthians 9:5

I Timothy 3:1-4; 4:1-3 (cf., I Peter 5:1,2) Who is being addressed?

What warnings are we given concerning wealth, pride and prestige? What examples did the apostles give us?

Matthew 6:19-33

Luke 20:46,47

Acts 3:6; 4:13, 32-37

I Timothy 6:3-19

Hebrews 13:5

What importance is given to worshipping together as believers?

Acts 2:40-44

Hebrews 10:24,25

Who is head of the church? Who is the “Holy Father?”

Ephesians 4:15,16 (cf., Colossians 1:18); John 17:11

How is the church of Christ to operate? What gifts and church offices (positions) are mentioned?

Romans 12:3-8

I Corinthians 12:27-31

Ephesians 4:11,12

I Timothy 3:1-15

Are *all* true believers considered *priests*, even women? (Are you a *priest* if you know Christ?) What is the role of a priest? Do priests have direct access to God without going through an intermediary?

Hebrews 4:14-16

Hebrews 10:19-22

I Peter 2:9

Revelation 1:6; 5:10

What freedom, guidelines and warnings are we given regarding food, ceremonies and such matters?

Acts 10:9-15

Romans 14:12-23

Colossians 2:16-23

I Timothy 4:3-5

What is one of the most important things that God wants you to incorporate into your life as a believer?

Mark 12:28-31

I Corinthians, chapter 13

I Peter 1:22,23 (cf., 4:8)

I John 4:7

WHEN SINCERE CHRISTIANS DISAGREE

The apostle Peter said, “*Always be prepared to **give an answer** to everyone who **asks** you to give the **reason** for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*” (I Peter 3:15, emphasis mine) Truth matters. As believers we are called to be informed about what we believe and why, and yet be respectful as we present our beliefs.

When it comes to controversial issues within Christianity we owe it to ourselves to study all sides of any given topic in order to make an informed decision. A German theologian once wrote, “**In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.**” That is wonderful advice. Regardless of our personal or denominational beliefs, we can still show Christian love and respect to one another. Historically, the church has not done a very good job at this.

Some years ago I was walking back from a football game with a dear friend of mine, a Catholic priest. He said, “*Bart, I just want you to know that I am Christian first and Catholic second.*” I responded, “*Mike, I want you to know that I am Christian first and Protestant second.*” Whether we are Catholic or Protestant, we are still

called to love one another and come together, as much as possible, on the things which unite us in Christ.

In love I am going to touch upon some things which have often divided Catholics and Protestants. PLEASE do not take my word for anything I write in this section. Do your homework. Check these things out for yourself. There are many websites where these issues are debated. My goal, is to call your attention to some of the scriptures which directly address these controversial issues. Read them. Study them. Research what others say about them, and then prayerfully make any decisions based upon which views you feel are most biblical.

By way of historical background, most of you have heard of the Protestant Reformation. It was started, not by some renegade Christians, nor by some weird cult group, but rather by sincere Catholics. In fact, most of the main Reformers were former Catholic priests. John Calvin, though not a priest, was raised a staunch Catholic. Martin Luther, who is generally known as the father of the Protestant Reformation, was a very dedicated *Catholic priest*. The last thing he ever wanted to do was leave the Catholic Church. As Luther began reading and studying the Bible for himself, especially the book of Romans in the New Testament, he became convinced that false teachings, such as the selling of indulgences and adding works as a condition for salvation, were clearly contrary to what the Bible teaches. Thus he posted his *95 Theses* on the Wittenberg church door, where he listed 95 scriptural falsehoods which he saw within the church. His call to repentance was met with anger, death threats and excommunication.

At about this same time in history, a man by the name of Gutenberg had invented the first printing press. Luther had written his *95 Theses* in Latin, but someone at the seminary where he taught saw it, translated it into German, unbeknownst to Luther, and used the printing press to mass produce it. Also, the first book in the world ever printed on a printing press was the Bible. The Bible was now becoming accessible to the masses. Anyone with a Bible could read and study Luther's scriptural arguments for themselves. As history shows, for centuries — and in some ways it is still that way today — the Catholic Church discouraged the laity from reading the scriptures. They were taught that only priests and the Magisterium were properly suited to interpret and understand the Bible. The Protestant movement, started primarily by Catholic priests, kicked into high gear when many Catholics began reading and studying the Bible for themselves. Because of their *protest* against the false teachings which they saw within the Catholic Church, these Catholics were labeled "*Protestants*." Ironically, these *Protestants* considered themselves the defenders of the true apostolic Catholic Church. They first tried to reform the Catholic Church from within.

One major doctrine which separates the Catholic Church from all other Christian denominations is the Doctrine of Mary. Here are some quotes which reflect past and ever-evolving Catholic theology:

"For after being assumed into heaven, she has not put aside this saving function, but by her manifold intercession, she continues to win the gifts of eternal salvation for us."—Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964 #62.

"Every grace that is communicated to this world has a threefold course. For by excellent order, it is dispensed from God to Christ, from Christ to the Virgin, from the Virgin to us."—St. Bernardine of Siena (as quoted by Pope Leo XIII)

Thus as no man goeth to the Father but by the Son, so no man goeth to Christ but by His Mother."—Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, September 22, 1891

"O Virgin most holy, none abounds in the knowledge of God except through thee; none, O Mother of God, attains salvation except through thee; none receives a gift from the throne of mercy except through thee."—Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, September 5, 1895, *St. Germ. Constantinop.*, *Orat. 11*, in *Dortnitione B.M.V.*

"Jesus 'sitteth on the right hand of the majesty on high' (Hebrews 1:8). Mary sitteth at the right hand of her Son—a refuge so secure and a help so trusty against all dangers that we have nothing to fear or to despair of under her guidance, her patronage, her protection."—Pius IX. in *Bull Ineffabilis*

"As she suffered and almost died together with her suffering and dying Son, so she surrendered her mother's rights over her Son for the salvation of the human race. And to satisfy the justice of God she sacrificed her Son, as well as she could, so that it may justly be said that she together with Christ has redeemed the human race."—Pope Benedict XV in his apostolic letter *Inter Sodalicia*, March 22, 1918.

"The foundation of all our confidence is found in the Virgin Mary. God has committed to her the treasury of all good things, in order that everyone may know that through her are obtained every hope, every grace, and all salvation. For this is His will: that we obtain everything through Mary. Sweet heart of Mary, be my salvation!"—Pope Pius IX

"For, since it is the will of Divine Providence that we should have the God-Man through Mary, there is no other way for us to receive Christ except from her hands."— Pope Pius X

The question is, "How do these quotes harmonize with the Bible?" For example, get a Bible concordance, or go online to such websites as *BibleGateway.com* where you can find verses based on given words or by topic; then simply answer these questions:

1. Does the apostle Paul ever mention Mary in any of his writings?
2. Do any of the epistles by Peter, James, John, Jude or the writer of Hebrews ever mention Mary?
3. Does the book of Revelation, which gives us the most complete picture of Heaven in the Bible, mention Mary? Pope Pius IX said that Mary's throne is at the right hand of Jesus. Is this what we see in Revelation, chapters 4 & 5?

Not counting the birth narratives of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew and Luke, Mary is mentioned twelve other times in the New Testament. (By way of contrast, the name *Jesus* is used 910 times, the name *Christ* is used 532 times, the name *Lord* is used over 600 times, not counting the many other names used of Jesus such as *redeemer*, *savior*, *Alpha and Omega*, *Lamb of God*, *King of kings*, etc.) **What theological importance, if any, do these twelve passages reveal about Mary?**

1. Matthew 1:24,25 (Did Mary remain a virgin after having Jesus?)
2. Matthew 12:46-48 (Some say these *brothers* and *sisters* were Joseph's children from a previous marriage.—Does the New Testament ever mention Joseph having been previously married? Is there any indication these children traveled with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, or lived with Joseph, Mary and Jesus in Egypt? Others say these *brothers* and *sisters* were really Jesus' *cousins*. If so, why didn't the New Testament writers use the Greek word, *cousin (anepsios)*?" For example, see how *anepsios* is used in Colossians 4:10.)
3. Matthew 13:55,56 (For other references to Jesus's *brothers*, see: John 7:2-10; I Corinthians 9:5 and Galatians 1:19.)
4. Mark 3:21,31-33 (What did Mary think about her son in verse 21? Did Jesus honor Mary's request in verses 31-33?) As a side note: who is the only sinless person mentioned in the Bible? See: I Peter 2:22; II Corinthians 5:21; Revelation 15:4. Is anyone else sinless? See: Romans 3:10,12,23; 5:12. Was Mary sinless or did she need a *savior*? See: Luke 1:46-47.
5. Mark 6:3,4
6. Luke 2:48-50
7. Luke 8:19-21
8. Luke 11:27,28
9. John 2:1-12
10. John 6:42
11. John 19:25-27
12. Acts 1:14

How would you summarize these passages about Mary?

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Communion, sometimes called the *Eucharist*, is a beautiful sacrament the Lord left with us, one that is to be practiced by all true believers. What instructions did the Lord leave us?

Matthew 26:17-30

I Corinthians 10:14-22

I Corinthians 11:17-32

Read John 6:25-63

1. Was Jesus' use of the word "bread" in verses 33-35 literal? Who or what did the bread in verses 33-35 signify? (Did Jesus literally come down from Heaven as "*bread*?")
2. In verses 55,56 Jesus says that we need to eat His flesh and drink His blood. Was this something He expected his disciples to do literally? Paraphrase verse 63 in your own words:

Did Jesus consider the communion wine *real blood*? Was Jesus literally drinking His *own* blood when He partook of communion with His disciples?

Matthew 26:28, 29

What does the Bible teach about drinking blood?

Leviticus 3:17; 7:26,27; 17:12,14; Deuteronomy 12:16,23; 15:23

Was Jesus' body literally "broken" at the last supper?

Matthew 26:26; I Corinthians 11:24 (cf., John 19:36)

In John 13, at the Last Supper, when Jesus instituted communion, He told His disciples that unless He washed their feet they would have no part in Him. Was He literally concerned about the dirt on their feet, and is feet washing necessary for salvation, or was feet washing symbolic of a deeper spiritual truth?

John 13:1-17 (note verse 8)

Jesus made numerous "*I am . . .*" statements in the Gospel of John. How many appear to be literal, and how many were symbolic?

I am the *bread* ... (John 6:48)

I am the *light* ... (John 8:12)

I am the *gate (door)* ... (John 10:9)

I am the *good shepherd* ... (John 10:11)
I am the *resurrection and the life* ... (John 11:25)
I am the true *vine* ... (John 15:1,5)
(In John 4:10-15, Jesus also likened Himself to *living water*.)

Why do you think Jesus so often used symbolic, figurative language and spoke in parables?

Matthew 13:11-17

John 16:25-30

In fairness to Catholics and Lutherans who believe in transubstantiation, that the bread and wine literally become the blood and body of Jesus, if you wish to read a well written article defending transubstantiation go to: www.catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Homiletic/Jan98/transubstantiation.html

BAPTISM

Baptism is one sacrament that all true Christians practice, even though the modes of baptism (sprinkling, pouring or immersion) varies from denomination to denomination. Some denominations teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. Others see it as important, as an ordinance commanded by our Lord in Matthew 28:19,20, but that it is *not* necessary for salvation, just as circumcision became a *sign* of belief for Abraham, but one which came *after* his forgiveness and salvation. (Romans 4:9-11.)

Does the Bible teach that anything else is necessary to continue the effectual work of Christ which He accomplished on the cross when He shed His blood and died for our sins? If you paid for something in full, would you still need to pay for it in other ways? When Christ died for our sins, were they really paid for in full?

John 19:30

Romans 6:5-10

Hebrews 9:11,12, 27,28; 10:10-18

Revelation 1:5,6 (What frees us from our sin debt?)

Did Paul consider baptism a crucial part of the salvation “*gospel*”?

I Corinthians 1:17 (How did Paul define the *gospel*? Romans 1:16.)

Some point to verses such as Acts 2:38; John 3:5 and I Peter 3:21, to argue that baptism is necessary for salvation. I suggest you read different commentaries on those verses. There are arguments to be made on both sides of this issue. There is one baptism which all Christians agree is necessary for salvation. (See: I Corinthians 12:13.)

Are we as believers *justified* (forgiven, declared righteous) through baptism, communion, circumcision or any other sacrament? What do the following verses seem to suggest? What truly saves us?

Romans 3:28

Romans 4:4,5

II Corinthians 5:17-21

Ephesians 2:7-9

Hebrews 7:25-28

Is there an example in scripture where people had the Holy Spirit, which is clear evidence of salvation, prior to being baptized?

Acts 10:47

If baptism is necessary for salvation, that would make our salvation dependent on another Christian being there to baptize us, since we can't baptize ourselves. Is our salvation dependent on anyone besides Jesus? The thief on the cross, who was crucified beside Jesus, had no chance of being baptized, and he had no good works to commend himself to Christ, yet Jesus promised him salvation based on his faith. Peter died by crucifixion (though crucified upside down). Had there been a similar thief beside him, could that thief have gotten saved, or would Peter have said, "*You can't be saved because there is no way for you to be baptized.*"? Could a prisoner with no one to baptize him/her, or a person dying in a hospital with only minutes to live, still find salvation without baptism? What does the Bible say?

Romans 10:12,13

Thank you for joining me in this study of God's Word. I think most Christians, whether Protestant or Catholic, would agree we are to interpret the more difficult and confusing passages of scripture with those most clear. Are there many other Bible passages not included in this study? Of course, which is why this study is more like an appetizer rather than the main menu. Having done this study I pray you are more aware of God's love and the power of His Word to transform your life.

Please allow me to offer this closing prayer:



MY CLOSING PRAYER FOR YOU

"Dear Lord Jesus, You know the hearts and minds of all people. I pray for all who have gone through this study. Grant them wisdom and discernment in understanding and applying the truths of Your Word. May they have a deep longing to know, love and serve You with all their heart, mind, body, soul, and strength. Please give them a passion to digest and apply Your Word. Where there has been any mishandling, misrepresentation or misinterpretation of Your Word on my part, please forgive me. Grant them the ability to see past my mistakes and short-comings and embrace only the truth. I pray these things in Your most holy name, Lord Jesus. Amen."