

Faith & Love

How Are We Saved?

How does one receive the gift of salvation?

At the end of his first sermon in Acts, the Jewish crowds asked Peter what they should do. He answered, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (Acts 2:37-38) This is still the same answer Catholics would give a crowd of questioners today. We need to turn away from sin and acknowledge our need for Jesus, and gratefully ask him to cleanse us of sin and give us new life through Baptism.

Why would Baptism be important?

At Baptism, we share in the Lord's death and Resurrection, and are washed clean from sin and given a new life. (Rom 6:4) Jesus was referring to Baptism when he spoke of the need to be "born again by water and the Spirit." (John 3:5) He himself said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." (Mark 16:16) This understanding of Baptism is clearly evident in Acts and has been practiced since the earliest centuries of Christianity.

Why do we need Baptism if we are saved by grace alone?

We are saved by grace alone, by the freely offered and undeserved gift of God. God can give his gifts in any manner he chooses, and he has chosen to offer us these spiritual gifts through Baptism. As an example, say a friend comes to your front door with a present. You have done nothing to "earn" the gift; you can only benefit from the gift by opening the door and accepting it. When we repent and have faith in Jesus, we open the door of our hearts, and when we allow ourselves to be baptized, we allow God to place his gift into our arms.

Doesn't Paul say that we are saved by faith, not works?

In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul writes, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." To this, Catholics say, "Amen!" We cannot earn our salvation by doing good deeds. It is through faith that we are moved to request God's gift of new life in Baptism, freely given by God and completely undeserved.

What does Paul mean when he writes of works?

In Paul's letters, when he refers to works, he is not speaking of Baptism. He is referring to circumcision and other works of the Jewish law, such as observing the dietary laws. He is clarifying that such actions are not required for Christians, and they do not bring about new life in Christ.

What is the Catholic understanding?

After explaining again that circumcision does not have value for Christians, Paul wrote, "The only thing that counts is faith working through love." (Gal 5:6) This is a great summary of Catholic belief: one must have faith that is expressed through acts of love. This is what the apostle James meant when he wrote that we are not saved by faith alone. (James 2:24-26) In other words, to have the abundant life which God desires for us, we must have faith in Jesus and also remain united with him in love. This, too, is the understanding embraced by Christians throughout all of Christian history.

