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God's Plans of Salvation

by Mark J. Ward

There have been at least three dispensations, or law ages since creation: The Patriarchal Age, The Mosaical Age and The Gospel Age. We are now living in the last days, or the gospel age (Hebrews 1:1ff), and God has a *plan of redemption* for the **alien sinner** (one who is not yet a Christian) and has *another plan of forgiveness* for those of us who are **Christians**. In this article, we would like to examine the teaching in the New Testament that gives us God's instruction on this topic. Please notice that our sole appeal is to the Word of God, rightly divided, in matters religious.

FORGIVENESS FOR NON-CHRISTIANS' SINS

God did not record all of the plan of salvation for the alien sinner in *one verse*, but rather, when we read all the accounts of conversions in the New Testament, we can come up with the *sum total* of what God requires of men and women in order to become His children today (and thus receive the remission of all past sins). God has certainly been merciful and loving in setting the conditions of salvation for man to meet. Man can never "merit" remission of past sins, rather, the *meeting of certain conditions that God has set forth* puts one into the family of God. The blood of Jesus Christ was shed on the cross for all men everywhere (Mt. 26:28; Acts 17:30), yet few are showing their love for God by meeting His conditions of salvation as set forth in Scripture.

In Mark 16:16, the Bible clearly teaches the essentiality of **faith**, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*" Who can contend that faith is not required?

Non-Christians must **confess** with the mouth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Confession is *just as essential* in one becoming a Christian and in receiving the remission of all past sins as "faith" is that was mentioned in Hebrews 11:6; Mark 16:16 and other passages. In Romans 10:10 we read, "*For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*". The eunuch made this verbal confession before he was baptized in Acts 8:37 when he said, "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*"

On the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ, as recorded in Acts 2, we read that Peter and the apostles preached the gospel of Christ. During the course of the sermon, Peter convicted the Jews of sin by telling them that the Jesus that they had crucified, God had made both Lord and Christ (See Acts 2:36). The erring were told to, "**Re-**

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Times of Services

Sundays - 2:00 pm Bible class, 3:00 pm Assembly Wednesdays - 6:30 pm Bible class

God's Plans of Salvation (con't)

pent, 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). Needing forgiveness of their sins, they were to respond to the gospel call and Peter gave them inspired instruction on what to do to be saved.

When we look to the New Testament teaching on becoming a child of God, we must not overlook the fact that once one has heard the Word of God and believes it (i.e. has faith) and is willing to repent of all past sins and is willing to confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, that person is not yet a Christian! God has determined that **scriptural water baptism**, for the penitent believer, is "for the remission of sins". Galatians 3:26-27 ties baptism to becoming a child of God. It reads, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." In Acts 22:16, Ananias told Paul, "arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." I Peter 3:21 teaches that we must be baptized to be saved when it says, "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." This verse does not teach that submitting to water baptism earns our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9, II Timothy 1:9, and Titus 3:5 teach that no work can do that), but it does teach that baptism is a condition that absolutely must be met to receive the salvation provided by Christ's blood.

Please notice that the passages of scripture in the following chart summarize what non-Christians did to become Christians and receive the forgiveness of all their past sins. *Note: "Prayer" is not a condition mentioned for aliens!*

Summary of God's Conditions for Salvation for the Alien

HEAR	BELIEVE	REPENT	CONFESS CHRIST	WATER BAPTISM
Rom 10:17	Rom. 10:9,10 Heb. 11:6	Acts 2:38 Lk. 13:3	Rom. 10:9,10 Mt. 10:32	Acts 2:38; Mk. 16:16 Mt. 28:18-20; I Peter 3:21 Gal. 3:26,27; Rom 6:3,4

FORGIVENESS FOR CHRISTIANS' SINS

Once a person becomes a Christian, all *past sins* are forgiven. But, Christians sin and need forgiveness. There are several passages that teach us what a child of God today must do in order for God to remit sins. Please notice that the plan of forgiveness (set of conditions set by God) *for the Christian is not the same as* that *for the alien sinner*. God has the right to set up any conditions He wishes. We show our love for Him by meeting these conditions and not trying to change them, by adding or subtracting from them! Please look up the scriptures below that are applicable to Christians receiving the remission of their sins in the summary chart that follows.

Summary of God's Conditions for Forgiveness of Sins for the Christian

REPENT	CONFESS SINS	PRAY GOD FOR FORGIVENESS
Acts 8:22	James 5:16-20 I John 1:6-9	Acts 8:22; James 5:16-20

Let us all resolve to teach and practice only the conditions that God has set for both aliens and Christians to receive the remission of sins. We have no right to teach otherwise.

Thanks for reading. - by Mark J. Ward (email: markjward@yahoo.com)