

# John 3:5-6 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:5-6 NASB)*

**Misinterpretation:** This passage is used by the UPC as evidence that a person must be baptized (born of water) and be filled with the Holy Spirit (born of the Spirit) in order to enter the kingdom of God. In other words, to be saved, according to the UPC's interpretation of this passage, a person must be baptized of water and receive the Holy Spirit.

**Facts:** It's indisputably clear that a person must receive the Holy Spirit to be saved (cf. Rom. 8:9). Therefore, the UPC's interpretation of the "born of the Spirit" portion of this passage is correct. (The problem with their view of receiving the Holy Spirit is that it is something that happens after faith—a view that Paul clearly disagrees with in Eph 1:13 when he writes that we are "sealed" with the Holy Spirit upon belief).

The greater question, then, is about baptism. What does Jesus mean when He says that a person must be born of water to enter the kingdom of Heaven? Is He referring to water baptism or something else?

In order to answer that question I'd like to quote from Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary. Their explanation of this passage is the best that I've read anywhere. I could just paraphrase it but in my mind that would be plagiarism. They sum it up better than I ever could.

Before I give the citation, though, I'd like to stress that

baptism is indeed commanded by Christ (cf. Mat. 28:19). Because of that, if a person claims to have believed and yet refuses to obey Christ then I doubt the sincerity of their belief. Nevertheless, baptism is a *response* to grace, it is not the *cause* of grace. We get baptized *because* we are saved, not *order to get* saved.

Without further ado, here is the quote from Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary ((I apologize for the long paragraph; that is how it was written))

*Of water has been interpreted as: (1) water baptism. But the NT teaches that one is born again at the point of faith, not baptism (Acts 10:43–47); (2) a synonym for the Holy Spirit. The phrase could be translated “born of water, even the spirit”; (3) a symbol of the Word of God (Eph. 5:26; 1 Pet. 1:23); (4) physical birth; (5) John’s baptism; or (6) a symbol, along with wind, in OT imagery for the work of God from above. The first three views are questionable since they must rely on future teaching in the Scripture which would not have been accessible to Jesus’ listeners For interpretation 4, the idea is that Nicodemus brought up physical birth (3:4) and Jesus went on to say, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (3:6). If one could enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, he would still be flesh. This position is not likely since Jesus’ words would be trivial and do not advance the argument. Options 5 and 6 are the better choices for the meaning of the statement. Option 5 is a viable one since Nicodemus would probably be familiar with John’s baptism. Jesus would be saying that one must identify with and accept John’s message (baptism) and then one would receive Messiah’s baptism in the Spirit as John promised (1:31–33). This view has both historical and theological support. Christ emphasizes by v. 6 that there are two realms, that of the flesh and the Spirit. Humans cannot save themselves but must rely on God’s Spirit to regenerate them. Option 6 relies on the translation of pneuma, wind or spirit.*

*Under this view the Greek term should be understood as wind rather than spirit and thus serve alongside of water as symbols for spiritual truths similar to how these terms are used in the OT (for example, Is. 44:3–5 and Ezek. 37:9, 10). Jesus, then, is contrasting the things from below (earthly womb) from the elements of water and wind from above (the divine work of the Spirit of God). A teacher of Israel should understand such OT imagery. Nicodemus may have been challenged by Christ, since he was a teacher of Israel, to understand the questions of Prov. 30:3–5: (1) Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? (2) Who has gathered the wind in His fist? (3) Who has bound the waters in a garment? (4) Who has established all the ends of the earth? (5) What is His name, and what is His Son's name? "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him" (compare John 3:15, 16). (( Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen and H. Wayne House, Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), Jn 3:5.))*

I agree with their opinion that views 5 and 6 are the most likely. I used to believe that being born of water referred to baptism, but I changed my mind even before I left the UPC. I decided that it was more likely that it referred to physical birth while being born of the Spirit referred to spiritual birth. I still think that is a plausible view; it does make sense textually. However, I now think that it was referring to OT imagery. I'm not dogmatic about my view because there are other explanations that make sense. This is one of those passages that has several potential interpretations. The one thing that they all agree on, though, is that Jesus is clearly saying that the Holy Spirit is necessary for salvation. That's what we need to focus on. The method of receiving the Holy Spirit—belief—is given several verses later, in John 3:16.

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# What Does The Bible Say About Salvation?

Several weeks ago I got a request through email from a lady. This is what she said:

*I was wondering if you could do a blog about what the Bible says about salvation? My husband and I are in a UPC church right now...and we are looking to get out. We studied and found that salvation is NOT speaking in tongues...but we want an exhaustive reference guide, from the point of a fellow ex-UPC'er. We can refute Acts 2:38 up and down...but it's man's refutations. Can you point out exactly why speaking in tongues isn't associated with salvation as well?*

I discussed their request with my fiance Kali—also a former UPC'er—and we thought that she raised a really good point. When we leave the UPC we often know what salvation *isn't* but we're not quite sure what salvation *is*. What does it even mean to be saved? Does it just mean that we're heading for the great Gloryland in the sky when we die? Or is there more to it? And how do we get saved? Is it by faith? Baptism? Is baptism essential for salvation? There are so many different interpretations, so many different beliefs, that it becomes overwhelming to try to sort it all out.

My prayer is that this article will answer the question that the lady and her husband asked while also helping others who are asking the same questions. ((Dealing with the entire subject of salvation throughout the Old and New Testaments would take hundreds of pages. If a person wants a good scholarly analysis of the topic then I highly recommend the International Bible Standard Encyclopedia article on it, which

can be found [here](#). In this article I'm going to deal with the more common use of the word.))

## What Is Salvation?

In the UPC salvation gets a lot of attention. We toss around phrases like, "They love the Lord so much, it's a shame that they don't have the truth," or, "That song [by a Trinitarian singer] is so anointed, they've almost got it!" When we say all of these things what we are really saying is, "That person loves the Lord but isn't saved," or, "That person has the Spirit of God resting upon them and blessing their music, but it's too bad they aren't saved." (When we stop and think about it in those terms it becomes apparent that it would be very strange that a person could love God and follow Him and yet not be saved, kind of like a cosmic game of hide and seek with people looking for Christ and never finding Him—the exact opposite of what Scripture says in Luke 11:9-13.) The point is, in the UPC we're obsessed with seeing people saved, and that's how it should be! Christians of all denominations should feel the same way. But in the UPC we've associated salvation with a theological understanding (Oneness) or an experience (tongues) or an action (dressing right). But is that what salvation really is? Is that how a person is saved? What does it really mean to be saved?

The word that most applies to our discussion is found in Acts 16:30-31, when a jailer of Paul was about to commit suicide because he thought that Paul had escaped:

*When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They*

*said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (NASB) ((All Scripture references are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.))*

The word that is translated as "saved" in the above verse is the Greek word *sozo*. It means "To save, deliver, make whole, preserve safe from danger, loss, destruction." ((The Complete WordStudy Dictionary, G4982, 1992, AMG International Inc)) Of the fifty-four times the word is used in the New Testament, "fourteen relate to deliverance from disease or demon possession...in twenty instances, the inference is to the rescue of physical life from some impending peril or instant death...[in] the remaining twenty times, the reference is to spiritual salvation." ((Ibid.)) The references to spiritual salvation are the ones we're interested in. Consider the following verses:

*"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)*

*And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (Acts 2:40)*

*Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. (Romans 5:9)*

*For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)*

*Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. (1 Timothy 4:16)*

*Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)*

*Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21)*

At this point one might wonder why I stop to define the word "saved," since it's certain that any reader with a background in Christianity will know exactly what I'm talking about. The reason is because I've seen quite a few debates about salvation online, and you'd be amazed at the number of people who throw Scriptures around about "salvation" when the type of salvation that the Scripture is talking about may not even be spiritual! Additionally, it's important to remember that the method of salvation could be quite different depending on the era that a particular passage was written in. Some passages deal with salvation as a nation (Israel), others with salvation as a family unit, and others with salvation as an individual. Because of all this, I want to stress that this article is dealing with the spiritual salvation that we find in the New Testament—salvation that saves and delivers us from the wrath of God and ushers us into heaven.

## **How Is A Person Saved?**

It's impossible to discuss what it means to be saved without first talking about how to be saved. I know that seems backwards, but it will make sense in a moment.

The person who emailed me requesting this article made a really good point. She said, "We can refute Acts 2:38 up and down...but it's man's refutations." I think that a lot of people are in that same situation. They know what salvation isn't. They've come to realize that it's more deep than an emotional experience but more simple than what they've been

taught. They've come to realize that a person doesn't have to spend night after night at an altar sweating and pleading and crying and begging for God's Spirit. They know what salvation is *not* but they don't quite know what it *is*. Fortunately for us, the Bible makes it abundantly clear. That's right. Very clear. The reason we missed it in the UPC is not because we weren't intelligent enough. It's so simple children all over the world understand it. The reason we missed it is because we put emphasis on the wrong things, twisted the verses out of context, then ran roughshod over the very clear teaching of Scripture—the very thing we accused all those Trinitarians of doing!

Consider the following passage of Scripture. Look at how plain the teaching is:

*“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved [sozo] through Him. (John 3:14-17)*

Now, we've been taught all our life that it was more complicated than this. After all, doesn't "just believe" lead to "easy believism"? (No it doesn't, but we'll deal with that in a moment.) Isn't this Scripture just one Scripture out of many that teaches us how to be saved? (If it is, then it's really surprising that Jesus wouldn't share the "whole plan of salvation" every time He spoke, since He must have realized that it would be hundreds of years before the New Testament canon was readily available to every Christian. As a matter of fact, neither Jesus or Paul or any other writer ever mentioned the UPC plan of salvation in any way, shape, or form.) But let's not get sidetracked, because the point that I want to make is very simple: Salvation (*sozo*) stands in contrast to



judgment. Let's read verse 17 again, and tack on verses 18-21 as well:

*"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." (John 3:16-21, emphasis mine)*

Think about that for a moment.

To be spiritually saved is to *not* be judged. To be lost is to be judged.

How does a person stand before a judge and not be condemned? The only way is to be declared innocent.

And that leads us to the obvious question: How do I, a sinner, stand innocent before God? Or, to put it another way, how does a person get made righteous before God?

Scripture calls it "being justified," and there's only one way, throughout all of the New Testament, that it happens, and that way is "faith."

## **Justification**

The Greek word for "justify" is *dikaioo* and it means "to render righteous" or to "declare...one to be just...such as he

ought to be" ((Thayer's Greek Definitions, G1344)). In other words, when we are justified we are rendered righteous and declared to be just. We're made right before God. We who were once dirty and sinful are now clean. We stand innocent.

Paul liked the word "justified." He used it a lot. Consider this passage in Romans:

*But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, **even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace** through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because **in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.** Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but **by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.** Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed **God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.**" (Romans 3:21-30, emphasis mine)*

That's a long passage, so let me sum it up: We're not righteous, but God is, and God passed over our sins and declared us righteous based upon HIS righteousness, not ours!

Now, call me crazy, but it sounds like Paul is saying that people are justified (made right with God) through faith. It's almost like what Jesus said back in John 3:14-17 when He said that people will be saved through belief.

But isn't this just part of the plan of salvation? Where's the speaking in tongues? If we're made righteous through faith then what about Jesus' Name baptism?

If belief is just part of a grander plan of salvation then both Jesus and Paul continually forget to mention it. Paul goes on to write this just a few chapters later:

*But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." (Romans 10:8-11, emphasis mine)*

As a matter of fact, Paul told the church in Corinth that he was not sent to baptize, and that he was thankful that he had hardly baptized any of them (1 Cor. 1:13-18)! Can you imagine a UPC preacher ever saying that? I've heard plenty of explanations in the UPC for that verse, but none of them did away with the simple fact that Paul esteemed preaching higher than baptizing, and he was comfortable thanking God that He hadn't baptized a lot of people. If baptism was an essential part of the "plan of salvation" then I can't imagine Paul ever penning those words.

And what about tongues? Paul's comment on the matter was that not everyone speaks in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30). No mention of there being two types of tongues, never a mention in Paul's writings (or anyone else's) about tongues being the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit. Instead, we find a tremendous emphasis in Scripture on belief along with an accompanying promise that it is sufficient for salvation. When we really stop and read Scripture for what it says, without trying to

tie it in knots and make it say what we *think* it should say, then we find that there is little emphasis on baptism, no emphasis on tongues, but tremendous emphasis on belief.

We'll talk about belief in just a moment, but first let's look at a few more Scriptures that emphatically affirm that we are saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ:

*In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise," (Ephesians 1:13, emphasis mine) (By the way, if you're wondering when people get baptized with the Holy Spirit, then the above verse tells you. It happens upon belief.)*

*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4)*

*for "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13)*

*'And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'* (Acts 2:21)

*and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. (Acts 13:39)*

*They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31)*

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)*

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"" (John 11:25- 26) (Sadly enough, the UPC would have to answer "no" to Jesus' question, for the UPC does not believe*

*that believing in Christ is enough to ensure eternal life.)*

*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." (John 5:24)*

*Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." (1 Timothy 1:16)*

*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." (1 John 5:1)*

*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." (1 John 4:15)*

*and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:15)*

The promise of salvation by faith through grace is written all throughout the New Testament. It oozes out from between the covers of the Bible. But we in the UPC were convinced that there just had to be more to it. So we twisted Scripture (the thing that we had accused others of doing) and prodded and poked and cajoled and tied unrelated Scriptures together until we came up with a theology of salvation that is completely and totally unrelated to anything Christ or Paul or any other apostle ever said!

Now let's talk about belief.

## **Belief**

We see now that we are made right with God (a.k.a. "saved") by

belief in Christ. But what does that mean?

The typical UPC view of belief is one called "easy believism." The view says that if belief alone is sufficient for salvation then a person can live a life of sin and still be saved. Now there are so-called Christians who believe that, but the UPC might be surprised to find out that those people are not in the majority. Every Trinitarian church that I have attended since leaving has taught strongly against sin. But is the UPC belief correct? Could a person just live however they want and still be saved? Does God just blink His eyes at sin and look the other way? Interestingly enough, Paul was accused of teaching that very thing, and this was his reply:

*"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be!" (Rom. 6:1-2a)*

The Greek word that we often translate "believe" or "faith" is the Greek word *pisteuo*, and it is difficult to translate properly into English. You see, in the English language when we say "believe" we often mean "intellectual acknowledgment." For example, I believe (intellectually acknowledge) that Africa exists, but I don't put my faith in Africa for anything. If I one day found out that Africa was a myth, the result of a global conspiracy theory, then my life would go on as before. Nothing would change (except for my belief in conspiracy theories). That's intellectual acknowledgment, but it's not biblical belief. It's not *pisteuo*.

*Pisteuo* means both intellectual acknowledgment (to be persuaded of a fact) and faith (to put confidence in that fact, or to entrust oneself to it). ((Thayer's, G4102)) Now, it's entirely correct to say that intellectual acknowledgment of Christ would by itself lead to "easy believism." Sadly, there are so-called Christians who behave that way. They say, "Oh, I believe in Christ," and they go on about their lives without being changed. They've intellectually acknowledged

Christ, but they haven't put their faith in Him. Those people are often called functional atheists, and they're no more saved than the squirrel outside my window.

To believe in the New Testament sense, though, requires a person to both intellectually acknowledge Christ as Lord *and* to completely entrust themselves to Him. It is a faith that demands action. If I had New Testament faith in Africa then I would intellectually acknowledge its existence and then move there and live completely off of African products. My life would depend on Africa. If Africa didn't exist then neither would I. I would have completely entrusted myself to it for life, and if I was wrong then I would be dead. That's *pisteuo*, and it's the type of belief that we're told to have in Christ.

When we believe in the New Testament sense we throw ourselves upon Christ for our salvation. We recognize that without Him we have no hope of eternal life. We declare Him Lord and pledge our allegiance to Him. It is a faith that demands action. Without action it's not *pisteuo*.

That's why God chose faith as the method through which grace works. You see, people often say that we're saved by faith, but that's not entirely correct. We're saved by grace. Faith is just the catalyst that triggers it (Eph. 2:8). That's why the proper phrase is "we're saved by grace through faith," not "we're saved by faith." (It's true that the Bible often says we are justified through belief, but when read in context the underlying factor is always God's grace. Apart from grace faith would be nothing.) Faith is our part, grace is God's. We throw ourselves on Him for our salvation and He responds. If we try to work our way to salvation then that just won't work. None of us can make ourselves righteous before God (Rom. 3:10). If we could work our way to salvation then we could boast (Rom. 4:2), but we can't so we don't. We throw ourselves upon God and He justifies us, He makes us right before Him. Then we have nothing to boast in except Christ crucified.

With all that in mind, this passage should make a lot more sense:

*For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other.*

*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

*For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the*



*world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:11-31)*

In other words, Christ did things exactly backwards—at least according to us humans (which means we're the ones who are backwards). Instead of trusting in our strength we trust in God's. To become strong we become weak. To become first we become last. Instead of trusting in our wisdom we become fools. Why? Because it's not our wisdom and strength that saves us, it's God's.

How much more foolish could you get than being saved by not working? How crazy is it to win a battle by surrendering? But for those of us who are saved by faith it's the power of God at work. Can we boast? Yes, but not in ourselves. Can we be proud? Yes, just not in us. The only One we can boast in is God.

We can't brag about how long we spent at an altar or how we prayed through or the experience we had or how loud we spoke in tongues. We can't even *not* brag about those things, because those things are irrelevant. We could spend 24 hours a day on our knees at an altar praying to speak in tongues, and if we ever did then it wouldn't even matter. As a matter of fact we would probably be worse off because our faith would probably be in the fact that we spoke in tongues, not in Christ. We can't boast in our wisdom or works or power or might or even our faith. The only thing we can boast in is the power of the God who saved us through His grace.

# The Relationship Between Works and Faith

So we're saved by grace through faith, but now what? What about all the Scriptures about works? After all, look at what James said:

*What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."*

*You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:14-26)*

Doesn't this stand in direct contrast to Paul's teaching? Doesn't it show that all the Scriptures about justification through faith were just one part of a smaller plan of salvation? Don't faith and works go hand in hand?

Yes, faith and works do go hand in hand, but not in the way that the UPC interprets it. You see, Paul says that faith *leads* to works. We're not saved *by* works, we're saved *for* works (Eph. 2:8-10). Consider this passage:

*"But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For **by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."* (Ephesians 2:4-10, emphasis mine)

There you see the relationship between faith and works. True faith leads to works. As a matter of fact, Christ has works prepared for us before we're even saved! Works is an integral part of Christianity, but works are a *result* of salvation, not a *cause* of salvation. Because of this, James could rightfully say that faith without works is dead. If James preached that sermon in front of Paul then Paul would have given him a hearty amen! Paul and James presented two sides of the same coin: Paul said that faith leads to works, and James said that without works you don't have faith. There's no reason to think that there was a conflict between the two of them regarding the method of salvation, or that Paul was only preaching one part of the larger "plan of salvation."

## **What About the Scriptures That Talk**

## About Us "Being Saved"?

Paul used the phrase "being saved" a couple of times. In 1 Cor. 1:18 he wrote, "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are **being saved** it is the power of God," and in 2 Cor. 2:15 he wrote, "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are **being saved** and among those who are perishing" (emphasis mine).

I have heard more times than I can count that these passages (and others like them) mean that salvation is a process. The people who teach this claim that we are never truly saved until we get to heaven. It may not be an official UPC doctrine, but I heard it in church after church. Are the people who teach this correct? Are we never truly saved until we die or are raptured?

In a sense the people who say that are right. In some ways salvation is a process. That's why I defined the word *sozo* at the beginning of this article. You see, the type of salvation we were discussing is most closely related to justification—the idea of being made right with God. It is accurate to say that certain aspects of salvation are a process, but it would not be accurate to say that justification is a process. You see, justification is being made right with God. You're either right or you're not, there's no middle ground. You can't be partly justified, or 3/4 justified. You're righteous or you're not righteous, and that's that.

When Paul talks about "being saved" in the above passages he is not talking about justification, he's talking about sanctification. Sanctification is the English translation of the Greek word *hagiazō*, and it means "to make holy." ("Strong's Greek Dictionary", G37) It would not be inaccurate to take every sermon that you ever heard about "holiness" and replace it with the word "sanctification." (The

difference, of course, is that sanctification has nothing to do with appearance, aside from the commands to be modest and moral, and everything to do with the way that we live our lives.)

Paul wrote:

*Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For **sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.***

*What then? **Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!** Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.*

*For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so **now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.** For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now **having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

(Romans 6:11-23)

(Did you catch that? Paul was being accused of preaching "easy believism" too, and he responded with an emphatic command that grace leads to sanctification (holiness) not sin! As a matter of fact, if you read Romans you discover that Paul taught that people were *more* likely to sin when they were trying to be saved through works!)

When we speak of sanctification it is entirely proper to say that we are "being saved." None of us are entirely holy yet, and we never will be. While we walk this earth we strive for holiness while recognizing that we will never achieve it. While on this earth we must trust in God's grace to cover us. That's what faith is. Therefore it's entirely accurate to say that we're "being saved," but it's *not* accurate to claim that we are not already saved. When we talk about "being saved" we are talking about sanctification, not justification.

In theology sanctification is often broken up into three types. The types sometimes go by different names, but I like to call them "present, progressive, and perfected." "Present sanctification" is the holiness that is bestowed upon us at the moment of salvation when we are robed with Christ; "progressive sanctification" is the ongoing process of becoming more and more holy as we walk with Christ; "perfected sanctification" is the perfect holiness that will be ours when we are glorified. So we are justified (made right with God) and sanctified (made holy before God) at the moment of salvation, but we are also becoming more and more holy as we walk with God day by day.

## **Tying It All Together**

## **A call to repentance**

"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"

(Rom. 2:4)

"you were dead in your trespasses and sins"

(Eph. 2:1)

The first thing that God does is call us to Him. You see, we can't even boast in our ability to seek for Him, because it doesn't exist! God calls us, we don't call Him. We're lost, He's the divine search-and-rescue party. He calls us to Him and we respond through faith.

It's worth noting here that I firmly believe that repentance is an integral part of belief. I don't think it's possible to acknowledge the holy God as Lord and Savior without being moved to fall at His feet and repent. I don't view repentance as a requirement so much as I think it's a necessary reaction to faith. It's true that we are commanded to repent, but I don't understand how a person could even have faith without being moved to repentance. The two go hand in hand. After all, a person wouldn't truly repent if they didn't think the one they were repenting to was capable of forgiving sins, so repentance in itself is a statement of faith. Conversely, I don't think a person can truly have faith without being moved to repentance. Therefore, I don't see a tension in Scripture between the commands to repent and the fact that we are saved by grace through faith. Faith naturally leads to repentance.

## **A response through faith, leading to justification**

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. "For God did not send the Son into the world to

judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

(John 3:16-17)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

(Ephesians 2:4-7)

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

(Rom. 3:28)

We respond to the call by throwing ourselves upon the mercy of Christ, and trusting Him wholeheartedly for our salvation. We don't try to work our way to God because He's already worked His way to us.

## **When we are justified we are regenerated**

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

(2 Cor. 5:17)

We didn't talk about regeneration yet in this article. It just means "being made alive." Paul summed it up when he wrote:

*For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. **Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the***



*old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:14-17, emphasis mine)*

## **Justification and regeneration leads to sanctification**

"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

(Gal. 3:27)

"But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life."

(Rom. 6:22)

When we are justified and regenerated we put on Christ. He takes our place and we take His. When God looks at us He sees Christ. We are no longer seen as unholy but as holy.

On a side note, there's some debate over whether or not the "baptized" in Gal. 3:27 refers to water baptism or Spirit baptism. I don't think it matters, because in the New Testament baptism was something that was done immediately upon a profession of faith. It was not until later that baptism was separated. The authors of the excellent book "Pagan Christianity" have this to say about baptism in the early church:

*"[I]t is typical in most contemporary churches for baptism to be separated from conversion by great lengths of time. Many Christians were saved at one age and baptized at a much later age. In the first century, this was unheard of.*

*In the early church converts were baptized immediately upon believing.*

*One scholar says of baptism and conversion, 'They belong together.*

*Those who repented and believed the Word were baptized. That was the invariable pattern, so far as we know.' Another writes, 'At the birth of the church, converts were baptized with little or no delay.'*

*In the first century water baptism was the outward confession of a person's faith. But more than that, it was the way someone came to the Lord. For this reason, the confession of baptism is vitally linked to the exercise of saving faith. So much so that the New Testament writers often use 'baptism' in place of the word 'faith' and link it to being 'saved' (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). This is because baptism was the early Christian's initial confession of faith in Christ."*

Therefore, I do not think we need to try to decide if Gal. 3:27 is talking about water or Spirit baptism. I think it's safe to conclude that all believers in the New Testament were baptized.

## **Sanctification leads to glorification**

"The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

(Romans 8:16-17)

"For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified."

(Romans 8:29-30)

When we are called home to heaven, either through death or the rapture, we will be glorified and will spend eternity with Christ. What a beautiful concept! I don't think anything more needs to be said about glorification, because Paul says it best:

*For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.*

*For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope*

*for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:14-39)*

# What About Baptism And Tongues?

I think that these questions have been answered throughout the article. Still, it may be good to make a couple of comments about the relationship of baptism and tongues in salvation before we close.

As I already pointed out, baptism in the early church was just assumed. If you believed then you were baptized. There wasn't any debate about whether or not it was necessary. Christ commanded it so the disciples did it, and that was that. For what it's worth, I think that's the way it should be today. Baptism was commanded by Christ, so when it's possible it should most certainly be done. (I can't imagine a scenario when it would be impossible to baptize by sprinkling, even if immersion were not feasible.) However, baptism is not directly related to justification. Baptism is a public confession of faith. Perhaps it has deeper spiritual significance, perhaps not. I honestly don't know, because arguments both ways are persuasive. (I think there's a lot to be said for baptism being a symbol of the covenant in the New Testament just like circumcision was a symbol in the Old.) What I do know, though, is that it was commanded by Christ and so it should be done, and that baptism does not lead to justification. Only faith does that.

Tongues is even easier to answer. There is no relationship between tongues and salvation. I can say that with total confidence. Tongues was mentioned three times in Acts (Chapters 2, 10, and 19) and there is every reason to believe that all three of those instances were nothing more than the gift of tongues at work. There is no reason to believe that tongues was in any way related to salvation. The Scriptural relationship simply isn't there. The Spirit was present and in those three instances the gift of tongues appeared. It's really that simple. Tongues was never taught as anything more than a gift by any of the apostles, and it was never even

mentioned by Jesus.

Additionally, logic says that the Holy Spirit has to be given upon belief. After all, Romans 8:9 says that "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." Yet we know that we are justified (made right with God) upon belief, regenerated (made alive in Christ) upon belief, and sanctified (made holy before God) upon belief. How could all of that happen and yet we still not belong to God? Yet if the UPC view of tongues is correct then that's precisely what happens. According to the UPC plan of salvation we can repent and be baptized and still not be saved. Are we half saved? Two-thirds saved? How does that even work? It just doesn't make sense.

If that's not enough, then consider what Paul says in Eph. 1:13-14:

*In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—**having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit** of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. (emphasis mine)*

Did I read that correctly? Did Paul just say that we are "sealed" with the Holy Spirit at the moment of belief? Yes, he did.

So we see, then, that tongues is nothing more than a gift of the Spirit. It's not the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit. If it were then everyone who believed would immediately speak with tongues with no delay. Common experience says that just doesn't happen.

## Conclusion

What does it mean to be saved? It means that we stand

righteous before God. We stand before Him pure and holy, not because of the things that we have done, but because of the grace of God. Christ has taken our sin and shame and made it His own, and He has robed us in Him. We are in Him, and when God looks at us He doesn't see our sins. He doesn't see our failures and mistakes. No, He sees a person who is perfectly righteous and holy, not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done. Our so-called righteousness can never bring us where we need to be. We can't pray hard enough, be baptized deep enough, or speak in tongues long enough to be saved. The only way to be made right and holy before God is through His grace, and that grace is granted through faith. That's what it means to be saved.

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## The Nature of Truth

*Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"*

*– John 18:37-38b*

If you used to be in the UPC then let me ask you, How many times have you heard someone say that they are thankful "for the Truth"? Or perhaps they said that they were thankful that God revealed "the Truth" to them. Or maybe they talked about how anointed a non-UPC singer or minister was, and then they said that it was a shame that the person they were talking about "did not have the Truth."

I used to hear those statements all the time! I think that we all have. But I am one of those people who likes to ask "Why"

about everything. As a matter of fact, one of my favorite quotes says this:

*"Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton was the one who asked why" (Bernard Baruch).*

One of the things that many Christians do is rattle off a Scripture or a phrase without stopping to think about what it actually means. I think that we all do that; that's certainly not something that's limited to the UPC! But one thing that you do hear the UPC talk a lot about is "having the Truth." So in this article I want to examine this question: *What does it mean for something to be true?* Once I have investigated the meaning of truth then I will look at two central UPC doctrines to see whether or not they really are "true."

Now, a lot of people might be thinking that I'm silly for asking what it means for something to be true. After all, if something is true then it is...true! But what does that word mean? More specifically, how does the word apply to us Christians?

One good definition of truth is that *it is consistent and it corresponds to reality*. That is the definition that my systematic theology professor repeated until we practically had it coming out our ears! And it is certainly a good definition. Notice that the definition says that truth corresponds to reality, not to itself. The reason it says that is because there are plenty of people who teach and believe that truth just needs to correspond to itself. The problem with this is obvious: If a person starts with an untrue starting point then the rest of their system (whatever it might be) will also be untrue.

My philosophy professor used evolution as an example of a view of truth that corresponds with itself instead of corresponding to reality. He called it a "mesh" system, meaning that if any one point of it was proven false then a new theory was made to



account for the portion that was proven false. In other words, there's no way to prove evolution false to someone who believes strongly in the theory. Why? Because it corresponds with itself, even though many scientists would argue that the actual points of the theory are incorrect. (I believe that the UPC also has a "mesh" view of truth, but that is not the subject that I am discussing in this article!)

The point is this: There is more than one view of truth and knowledge that exists in the world today. For instance, many different religions believe that there is no one correct way to God; they believe that all paths are equally valid ((This is known as "[religious pluralism](#)")). The Christian view stands in opposition to this because it claims that Jesus is the only way to God, but the religious pluralist responds by saying that the Christian view is right for the Christians but the Muslim view is right for the Muslims, etc.

So with that in mind let us return to the original question: What is truth?

Well, as I already said, my systematic theology professor defined truth as *that which is consistent and corresponds with reality*. I do believe that is a very good view of truth, so I want to use that for a starting point and break this subject down a little farther. Specifically, I want to explain why truth must be consistent and why it must correspond with itself. To do this we must look at three fundamental laws of logic. These are:

1. The law of non-contradiction
2. The law of the excluded middle
3. The law of identity

Please bear with me here! I know it's easy to zone out as soon as someone writes or says "fundamental laws," but this is important to understanding exactly what truth is! And I promise that it's not that complicated either. Actually, these

three laws are very simple and even intuitive.

The law of non-contradiction simply says: *Something cannot both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect.* Example: Something cannot be green and not green at the same time and in the same way. That's pretty simple, right? Similarly, I cannot be in my chair and out of my chair at this very moment in time. I am sitting in my chair, and it's impossible for me to not be sitting in my chair at the same time.

The second law, the law of the excluded middle, says: *Something either is or is not.* In other words, something either exists or it does not exist. Something cannot exist and not exist at the same time. Very simple and intuitive!

Finally, the law of identity says: *Something is what it is.* This is very similar to the first law. Something cannot be what it is and what it is not at the same time.

These laws seem very intuitive (and they are) but the reason they are given names is because they serve as a starting point for all discussions. Even if a person does not know the laws by name they know them intuitively. Furthermore, these laws cannot be refuted. It's impossible! Why? Because a person must use one of the laws in order to refute the laws! Give it a try, it's kind of fun! (I tried it when my philosophy professor presented these laws to us, and I found out that they are impossible to refute. I guess all those Ph.D.'s were right after all; at least on this point.)

Now that I've given these three laws let me bring it to a practical level by looking briefly at the UPC's view of baptism. The UPC view of baptism is that a person must be baptized in the Name of Jesus in order to be saved (["Why We Baptize In Jesus' Name"](#), Accessed 8/12/2007)). However, it is my experience that many people in the UPC find it hard to accept the idea that God is sending almost every believer for

the last 2,000 years to hell because they were baptized the wrong way. So, when backed into a corner, many in the UPC will say something like this:

*"I refuse to put anyone in hell; I believe that God might let people into Heaven if they were baptized in the Titles and that was all they knew, but if they see the necessity of being baptized in the Name of Jesus and they refuse to obey 'the Truth' then they are responsible for their disobedience."*

That statement sounds really good on the surface, but let's apply the fundamental laws of logic to it. First, this statement is effectively saying that "the Truth" only becomes true once a person sees that it is true.

Think about that for a moment. That is like saying that the speed limit in front of my apartment only becomes 30 miles per hour when I see the sign, and that if I do not see that it is 30 miles per hour then the speed limit does not exist (or that it is not 30 miles per hour). See the fallacy? If the speed limit is 30 miles per hour then it is 30 miles per hour whether or not I realize that it is. In the same way, if baptism in the Name of Jesus is necessary for salvation then it is necessary whether or not a person realizes that it is. On the other hand, if a person can get into Heaven without being baptized in the Name of Jesus then baptism in the Name of Jesus is not necessary for salvation.

Put quite simply: Baptism in the Name of Jesus cannot simultaneously be necessary and unnecessary at the same time.

I believe that the illustration I just gave makes it easier to understand why the three fundamental laws of logic are so important! A doctrine or belief can sound really good on the surface, but it might not hold up when put to the logical test.

For instance, earlier in this article I commented on the Hindu believe that all paths to God are equally valid. This is what Dr. Norman Geisler has to say about that idea in his book "Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views" (the italics and bold print are added by me for emphasis):

*How does one decide on a world view? They cannot all be true, for they hold mutually exclusive views on many essential points. For example, atheism and theism cannot both be true, for atheism affirms that "God does not exist" and theism affirms that "God does exist." Likewise, God cannot be both finite (finite godism) and infinite (theism). Nor can miracles be possible (theism) and impossible (deism, atheism). The opposite of truth is falsehood. Hence, if one view is true, then the opposite must be false, unless, of course, one claims that there is no such thing as truth. But the problem with such a statement is that it claims to be true, thereby defeating its own claim that nothing is true ((Worlds Apart: A Handbook On World Views". Geisler, Norman L., Watkins, William D)).*

The last sentence is the most important. Did you catch the problem that Dr. Geisler is pointing out? He is saying that when a person says that all truths are equally valid (such as the pluralist belief that all paths lead to God) then they are claiming absolutely that there is no absolute truth! In other words, they are breaking the law of non-contradiction because they are claiming that there are absolutely no absolutes! They are making a statement that they claim is true, but the statement claims that there can be no truth!

So the pluralist claim that all paths lead to God sounds very good, just like it sounds good when someone in the UPC claims that baptism in Jesus' Name only becomes necessary once a person realizes it is necessary. But when put to the test we find that both of these views are equally impossible from a logical standpoint. Of course, a person can still choose to

believe these things, but they need to recognize that they are believing them purely because of faith and that there is no logical basis (nor can there be) for their view.

So let me summarize what we have covered so far, and then we will move on to examining two central UPC doctrines to see whether or not they are true.

For a general definition of truth I have chosen the definition given by my systematic theology professor: *Truth is that which is consistent and corresponds to reality.* For the rest of this article I am going to use a more specific definition for determining biblical truth:

*Biblical truth is that which is consistent and does not conflict with other Scripture.*

With that definition in mind let's look at two UPC beliefs to see whether or not they are true. In other words, let's see if these two beliefs *are consistent and do not conflict with other Scripture.*

The first belief that I have chosen to examine is the belief that a person must repent in order to be saved. The official UPC position says:

*Luke 13:5...reads, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish". [sic] Plainly, then, the tragic alternative to repentance is eternal perdition (["Except Ye Repent"](#), Accessed 8/12/2007)).*

The question that we need to ask is this: Does the UPC belief that a person needs to repent of their sins in order to be saved contradict other Scriptures? Specifically, does that belief contradict other Scriptures such as Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13, which say that everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved?

On the surface it appears that there is a contradiction, but I am convinced that this contradiction is only an apparent one. I feel that repentance is indeed necessary for salvation. The reason that I believe this is simple: It is impossible to accept Jesus as Savior if a person does not believe that they are in need of saving. In other words, if I do not realize that I am a sinner then why would I call on the Name of the Lord and ask Him for salvation?

On top of this, Jesus commanded repentance (cf. Mat. 4:17, Luke 13:5). If a person blatantly refuses to obey Jesus and repent then I propose that they do not truly believe He is Lord. When a person truly accepts that someone is their Lord then it requires that they admit that they are not Lord. Put bluntly, the most difficult barrier to getting people to come to Christ is getting them to admit that He is God and that they are not.

So, once again, I do not believe there is a real contradiction between the UPC view that repentance is necessary for salvation and the Scriptures that say that a person just needs to call upon the Name of the Lord to be saved. I am convinced that calling on the Name of the Lord involves repentance, so the contradiction is only *apparent*, not *real*.

The score is therefore 1-0 for the UPC. Now let us look at another doctrine that is central to the UPC: The doctrine that says that speaking in tongues is necessary for salvation.

(Before I begin I should point out that the UPC view is that the Holy Ghost is necessary for salvation, and on this point I agree with them, just like every other evangelical Christian does. However, speaking in tongues is synonymous with the Holy Ghost to the UPC (since they believe that the initial evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost is that a person speaks in tongues (["The Gift of the Holy Ghost"](#), Accessed 8/12/2007))), so that is why I say that I am examining the UPC doctrine that says that speaking in tongues is necessary for salvation.)

The UPC uses three Scripture passages to "prove" that speaking in tongues is the evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost: Acts 2:1-4, Acts 10:44-48, and Acts 19:1-6 ((Ibid.)). From these three passages the UPC extracts the doctrine that "The initial, outward evidence [of receiving the Holy Ghost] is speaking in tongues, which means speaking miraculously in languages the speaker does not know ((Ibid.))."

But is this doctrine true, or does it contradict other Scripture? Specifically, does it contradict 1 Cor. 12:28-30, which says:

*1Co 12:28-30 (NASB, bold print added for emphasis)*

*(28) And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.*

*(29) All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?*

*(30) All do not have gifts of healings, do they? **All do not speak with tongues, do they?** All do not interpret, do they?*

It is obvious from the context that Paul is asking rhetorical questions and that the answer to each question is "No." It is very important that Paul did **not** ask, "**All do not have the gift of tongues**"; Instead, he asked, "**All do not speak with tongues, do they?**" (This is a crucial difference since the UPC believes that Paul was talking about the gift of tongues in this passage, which the UPC believes is separate from "tongues as the initial evidence of the Holy Ghost." It is my opinion that if every believer who received the Holy Ghost was speaking in tongues *then Paul never would have worded his question in the matter that he did.* His goal was to cut down on confusion in the church at Corinth, not add to it!)

So at this point in the discussion the UPC has three Scripture passages that they claim are examples of people speaking in

tongues when they initially received the gift of the Holy Ghost. From this they extrapolate the doctrine that all believers speak in tongues when they receive the Holy Ghost. In contrast to this we have a direct statement from Paul saying that all believers do not speak with tongues.

This definitely appears to be a true contradiction, but let us keep looking.

The question that we need to ask next is this: Are there any examples of people being filled with the Holy Ghost or receiving the Holy Ghost when they did *not* speak with tongues? Interestingly enough, there is one example: Paul himself.

*Act 9:17-19a NASB (bold print added for emphasis)*

*(17) So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may **regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**"*

*(18) And **immediately** there fell from his eyes something like scales, and **he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;***

*(19) and he took food and was strengthened.*

Apparently Ananias did not plan on wasting any time. He walked in the door and told Paul that he had been sent for two reasons: 1) that Paul would regain his sight and 2) that Paul would be filled with the Holy Spirit. Then Ananias gets right down to business; he lays his hands on Paul and Paul's vision is restored. Then what happened? Paul got baptized. Then what happened? He ate a meal.

And that's it.

No mention of tongues.

So it appears that the UPC's claim that "Speaking with other



tongues has been connected with Spirit baptism since the beginning of the church age" ((Ibid.)) commits the sin of omission by failing to include every applicable example of people being filled with the Holy Ghost. It is also interesting that there is no mention of any of the (approximately) 3,000 believers baptized on the Day of Pentecost speaking in tongues (Acts 2:41).

(Another example of someone being filled with the Holy Ghost and not speaking in tongues is when John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost. According to Luke 1:15 he was filled with the Spirit while still in his mother's womb, and, while it is possible that he spoke in tongues, I find it rather unlikely.)

Also, on closer inspection of the UPC's "proof Scriptures" for tongues being the initial evidence of a person receiving the Holy Ghost we find that one of the passages does not even qualify! Which one? Acts 19:1-6. The careful reader will note that the passage does not say that the 12 disciples were **filled** with the Holy Ghost, it says that the Holy Ghost **came upon** them. This seems like a small difference, but it is a very important one. It was quite common all throughout the Old Testament for the Holy Spirit to "come upon" a person or group of people, yet we know from John 7:39 that the Spirit was not given until Jesus was glorified. (For examples of the Holy Ghost coming upon people in the Old Testament see the following Scriptures: Numbers 11:25, 24:2, Judges 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 14:6, 14:19, 15:14, 1 Samuel 10:10, 11:6, 16:13, 19:20, 19:23, 1 Chronicles 12:18, 2 Chronicles 20:14.)

Finally, we have Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 14:22 which says that tongues is a sign to the *unbeliever*, not the *believer*. The UPC view of tongues stands in direct opposition to Paul's statement, because the UPC teaches that tongues is the initial evidence to the believer (and by extension to those around him or her) that they have received the Holy Ghost. So the UPC makes tongues a sign to the believer when it

is actually meant to be a sign to the unbeliever.

So, to summarize, we actually have two Scripture passages showing where people spoke in tongues when they received the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:1-6 and Acts 10:44-48). In contrast to this we have a direct statement by Paul saying that not all believers speak in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30) and the absence of any record of Paul himself speaking in tongues when he received the Holy Ghost. Last but not least, we have the fact that tongues is supposed to be a sign to the unbeliever, not the believer.

In light of all of this evidence I am forced to conclude that there is a *real* contradiction between the UPC view and the biblical view of tongues. In other words, *the UPC view of tongues is consistent with itself but it is **not consistent with the entirety of Scripture***. The fact that the UPC view is consistent with itself makes it sound very good, but when the entirety of Scripture is examined then one finds out that the UPC view is not consistent with the rest of Scripture.

So the score is now UPC 1 – Bible 1.

What can we learn from all of this? Well, if you are reading this article and you have never taken a philosophy course or a course in logic then you probably learned that an idea that seems so simple (like truth) can actually be quite complicated! In all seriousness, though, I am hoping that those who read this article will have a better idea of what truth actually is and that they will know how to apply the basic principles of logic to other doctrines and teachings to find out whether or not they are correct.

It is my hope and prayer that readers will always remember to check out the entirety of Scripture when examining doctrines to find out whether or not the doctrine conflicts with itself logically and whether or not it conflicts with other Scripture.

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## Matthew 28:19 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost...*

**Misinterpretation:** The UPC points out that this Scripture says to baptize in the Name (singular). They go on to say that the Name is Jesus, and they quote Acts 2:38 as proof (because Peter instructed people to be baptized in the Name of Jesus). Unfortunately, the UPC believes that if a person was baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, then their baptism was invalid and they are not truly saved.

**Facts:** I will not open up a debate on Oneness vs. the Trinity here, or a debate on whether or not baptism is necessary for salvation. Instead, I will say that I really do not think that Jesus is going to send the majority of His followers to hell for obeying Him. Think about that for a moment. Is Jesus really going to take a person who love Him and faithfully served Him, but was baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost and send them to hell—especially when He was the one who told them to be baptized that way? Is that really the kind of God that we serve?

Furthermore, if the UPC view is true then the majority of so-called Christians for the last 2,000 years have gone to hell. I find it hard to believe that Jesus came to Earth, suffered, died, was buried, and rose again, just so that He could trick almost all of His followers into going to hell.

Finally, the UPC often claims that Christians baptized in the Name of Jesus until the Roman Catholic church came on the

scene. They believe that the Roman Catholic church corrupted Christianity with the doctrine of the Trinity (which the UPC equates with polytheism) and a false baptism. However, recent historical discoveries make it clear that the early Church was baptizing people in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost at a very early date. The Didache—written between c50-250 A.D.—instructs people to be baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ((Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary. Rev. ed. of: Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary.; Includes index ("Didache"). Nashville: T. Nelson.)). This means that it is very possible that the early Church was already baptizing people in the Titles when the Apostle John was still alive!

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## Mark 16:16 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

**Misinterpretation:** The UPC and some other groups often use this Scripture to say that a person must be baptized to be saved.

**Facts:** The purpose of this discussion is not to talk about whether or not baptism is necessary, but to point out that Mark 16:16 is almost certainly an apocryphal Scripture (meaning that it was probably not part of the original Book of Mark). As a matter of fact, all of verses 9-20 are apocryphal in the 16th chapter of Mark. Most modern English translations put Mark 16:9-20 in brackets to show the reader that those

verses were probably not in the original text.

I will not go into all of the reasons that scholars think these 11 verses are apocryphal. Instead, I will point the reader to two very good overviews of the subject. This first is a collection of comments from various study Bibles and commentaries, found at the [Bible Research](#) Web site. This site also offers an article by a scholar who does feel that Mark 16:9-20 was part of the original text, so you can read both sides of the debate. The second is the [Wikipedia article on Mark 16](#). Both of these sites are excellent starting points for you to do your own study into the subject.

Finally, I want to remind you once again that I am not debating baptism here, I am only pointing out that Mark 16:16 should not be used to try to prove the necessity of baptism. Please do not write me with all the reasons you think baptism is necessary! I believe that it is necessary as well (although I do think there are circumstances where a person can be saved without being baptized [cf. Luke 23:39-43]), so you will be wasting your time by e-mailing me!

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## [Acts 2:37-38 \(Misinterpreted Scriptures\)](#)

*Now when [the Jews present at the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost] heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, 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.*

**Misinterpretation:** This is the “flagship” Scripture of the UPC and of all Oneness Pentecostal churches. There are many ways that this Scripture is mistaught by the UPC, but the only error that I will point out here is that many Oneness Pentecostal preachers and saints misquote the Scripture by reciting, “Men and brethren, what shall we do *to be saved.*”

**Facts:** The careful reader will notice that the words “to be saved” are not found in Acts 2:37. Peter had already told the believers how to be saved in Acts 2:21, when he quoted the prophet Joel and said, “[W]hosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” By the time Peter concluded his sermon in Acts 2:36, the Jews who were present were “pricked in their heart.” That is when they asked Peter and the “rest of the apostles,” “[W]hat shall we do?”

The reason that this is important is because these men had already believed in Christ. That’s why they were pricked in their heart! They wouldn’t have ever asked the question unless they already believed on Christ! If they didn’t believe then they would have laughed and walked off. However, they did believe, and so they were moved to ask what they needed to do. Peter responded by telling them to be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, and that they would receive the Holy Ghost.

The point is that it was not baptism who saved the new believers, it was their belief. (More properly, it was God’s grace working through their belief). Their baptism was a *response* to their salvation, not the *cause* of their salvation. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia sums it up well when they write, “Peter’s ‘Repent ye, and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ’ (Act\_2:38) is meaningless unless faith were exercised in Christ.” ((ISBE, “Justification”))

I will conclude my discussion of Acts 2:37-38 by quoting the story of the jailer’s conversion, found in Acts 16:27-34, which makes the distinction between belief and baptism even more clearer.

Act 16:27-34 KJV

(27) *And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.*

(28) *But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.*

(29) *Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,*

(30) *And brought them out, and said, Sirs, **what must I do to be saved?***

(31) ***And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.***

(32) *And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.*

(33) *And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.*

(34) *And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*

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## **Acts 4:12 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)**

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

**Misinterpretation:** This Scripture is often quoted by Oneness Pentecostals as a proof for the importance of baptism in Jesus' Name. Their reasoning is that no one will be saved

except by the Name of Jesus, so that means that people must be baptized in the Name of Jesus to be saved.

**Facts:** No true Christian doubts that a person will only be saved by the Name of Jesus. However, Peter was not talking about baptism in Acts 4:12. He was answering the question that the high priest had just asked him, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (Acts 4:7 KJV). Peter answers that the power, or Name, that he has done these things through is the Name of Jesus, "[F]or there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Some members of the UPC would probably continue to debate this point with me. They might claim that the Bible says "we **must** be saved" by the Name of Jesus. My response would be that it is God's grace working through our faith that saves, not baptism, and I agree that if a person does not believe in the Name of Jesus then they will not be saved. However, I do not believe that a person must be baptized in the Name of Jesus to be saved. To believe that is the equivalent of teaching that Jesus will send people to hell for obeying Him (cf. Mat. 28:19).

Is Jesus really going to send people to hell for taking him literally when he commanded his disciples to baptize in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? People who baptize this way are not denying Jesus, they are actually doing their best to obey Him! You see, it is not what is said during baptism that saves you, it is God's grace working through faith.

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## (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

**Misinterpretation:** This Scripture is used to teach that baptism in the Name of Jesus is necessary. The logic is that we are supposed to do *everything* in the Name of Jesus, and *everything* includes baptism. UPC preachers often go on to say that Trinitarian preachers will pray in the Name of Jesus, marry in the Name of Jesus, and do many other things in the Name of Jesus, but that they will not baptize in the Name of Jesus.

**Facts:** First, this Scripture has nothing to do with baptism. Paul is writing about living a godly life, and he is reminding people that they need to do everything "in the name of the Lord Jesus." One could think of this as an ancient "WWJD" saying. Paul was reminding the Colossian church to always live their lives in a way that is pleasing to God (cf. Col. 3:8-17). Second, the UPC forgets that Trinitarian preachers are obeying Jesus when they baptize in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost [see [my notes on Mat. 28:19](#)].