

# What Must One Believe about Jesus for Salvation?

There seems to exist considerable disagreement among field workers about what one must actually believe about Jesus in order to put faith in him sufficient for salvation. Here the author describes beliefs necessary and unnecessary for saving faith. These are based upon a list of Scripture passages that exemplify sufficient as well as insufficient faith in Christ the Lord.

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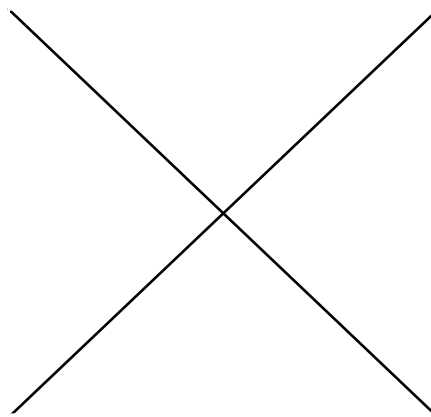
by Rick Brown

While Evangelicals are basically united in their proclamation of salvation by grace through faith, and while most agree that faith is a personal relationship with Christ rather than a belief in a list of doctrines, there seems to be some disagreement and confusion among field workers (missionaries) about what one must actually believe about Jesus in order to put faith in him sufficient for salvation. For surprisingly many people, saving faith is a belief in the vicarious substitutionary punishment of Christ, i.e., Anselm's theory of the atonement. If one accepts this doctrine, one is saved, otherwise one is lost. One mission has expanded this to a list of twenty doctrines that one must believe to be saved, almost all of them concerned with mankind's guilt and Jesus' vicarious punishment. Although this doctrine can be fully justified from Scripture, it wasn't developed until the 11th century, and it is not part of the public proclamation of the Gospel recorded in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> If belief in it were essential to salvation, then the Apostles failed to preach the Gospel and no one was saved until Archbishop Anselm propagated this doctrine in the church.

Another large mission had a list of doctrines which a person must believe before he or she can be considered saved, including the inerrancy of the Bible and the Trinity, but not Anselm's theory of the atonement. For one group the focus was on Jesus as a substitutionary sacrifice, in the second the focus was on Jesus as the second person of the Trinity.<sup>2</sup>

A person with a third group said the critical doctrine was to believe that Jesus is God. I asked what Scripture that was based on and was given John 8:24: "for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." This popular interpretation ignores the fact that (1) when Jesus was subsequently asked who he is, he called himself "the Son of Man" (8:25-28), and (2) the similarity between this verse and Exodus 3:14 exists only in the Latin and certain English translations, but not in the Greek nor in the Hebrew. So even though Jesus is God, he was not saying "You must believe that I am Yahweh to be saved."

There are yet others who believe that one cannot be saved without saying the "sinner's prayer." Christians in this stream will not distribute the Jesus film or tapes of the Gospels unless they conclude with something like the four spiritual laws and the sinner's prayer. The reason for this position is that without them the Gospels themselves, whether on tape, video or print "do not include the Gospel." Although I use



the sinner's prayer myself, I have noticed that there is nothing remotely similar to it in the Bible, in spite of the many accounts of preaching and conversion. This leads one to suspect that God could save people without it. The curious thing is that God does save without it. Particularly in the Muslim world, many people want to know whom to follow. They want to know where the truth lies. It is scandalous in their society even to ask this question, for it is considered apostasy even to doubt the religion into which they were born. But these brave people ask God to lead them to the truth, Jesus appears to them in a dream or vision and calls them to follow him, and they become followers of Christ, sometimes at great cost. But some missionaries remain uncertain about the salvation of these

new believers, even if their lives are full of testimonies of God's grace, because they have not said the sinner's prayer. So the missionaries seek, not just to teach these precious believers, but to reconvert them in accordance with their own traditions regarding criteria for salvation.

The Scriptures teach that one is saved by faith in Jesus, but what does saving faith entail? It is clear from the Scriptures on the one hand that a person is saved, not by doctrine per se, nor by special prayers, but by personal faith in Jesus as *Christ his Lord*.<sup>3</sup> "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12).<sup>4</sup> Faith thus involves both a belief about *the name of Christ* (meaning the role of Christ), and a relationship with him based on receiving him in that role. One believes that Jesus is who he says he is, and one trusts him and personally accepts him in that capacity. So the question is, "What must one minimally believe about Jesus, about his name and role, in order to put faith in him adequate to enter the Kingdom and be saved from condemnation?"

## Beliefs Necessary for Saving Faith

Are there propositional truths which one

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must believe before one can exercise faith in Christ adequate for salvation? John Murray (1977:259) writes, "To require of sinners that they give assent to the propositions is to contradict truth and the consciousness of the sinner himself. ... Faith is in its essence commitment to Christ that we may be saved". What he means is that sinners are unable to understand Christian doctrine until after they have been born again through accepting Christ as Lord. Charles Hodge appears to disagree. He notes that while faith is trust in Christ, there are certain facts one must believe about him before one would be willing to trust him. He discusses accepting Christ for all that he claims to be, but ends up with the following conclusion:

So what the penitent sinner believes is that God for Christ's sake is reconciled to him. It may be with a very dim and doubtful vision he apprehends that truth; but that is the truth on which his trust is stayed. (1874:102)

Both men were great and godly Evangelical theologians and should be taken quite seriously. C. H. Dodd (1936) analyzed all of the New Testament passages that report the content of the Gospel that was preached by the Apostles. He notes a large number of common elements, usually in the same order. Basically they proclaimed:

the fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus the Messiah,  
the inauguration of God's Kingdom with his ministry,  
the basics about his life and death,  
his resurrection and exaltation to power at the right hand of God,  
his second coming as king to judge all people,  
and to usher in the new age for those who are saved from wrath,  
followed by a call to repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

But the Apostolic preaching did not always include all of these points, and some of them are clearly not essential to the same degree as others. The object at hand is not to discover all the elements of the Gospel message that should be preached, as important as that is, but to identify the core beliefs about the "name" (role and position) of Jesus which are essential to believe for salvation. Fortunately there are many Scripture passages that state what people should believe about Jesus to be saved or what they did believe when they were saved. These passages will be presented below, but the conclusion to which they lead is a simple gospel indeed: what is required for salvation is a personal decision to accept and follow Jesus as (1) the *Lord Christ*, who conquered death, who now rules from heaven and is coming again to judge the living and the dead, and (2) who will save his people from hell and usher them into the eternal Kingdom. Those who put their faith in him receive the forgiveness of sins, the rebirth and guidance of the Holy Spirit, salvation from hell, and assurance of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. These essential beliefs can be summarized by subsuming part (1) under the title '*Lord*' or '*Christ*', if these are understood, and (2) under the title '*Savior*', if understood. In this form, we can state the required belief for salvation as the belief that Jesus is *Lord and Savior*, and the required faith as a personal acceptance of him in that capacity. This constitutes saving faith.

## Beliefs Unnecessary for Salvation

What beliefs are not essential to salvation, even if they are important for discipleship? There is no verse that says one must understand the divinity of Jesus to be saved. Biblical passages on the divinity of Christ are addressed to those who have already

There is no statement that one must believe Jesus is the Lamb of God or Word or Wisdom of God or God himself incarnate. There is no requirement for belief in the virgin birth or the Trinity. . . Seekers must simply receive Him as their Lord and Savior—an act which also implies repentance from what is contrary to his lordship.

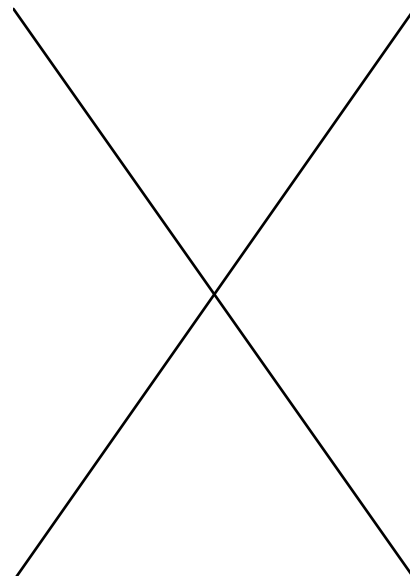
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believed in Jesus as *the Christ their Lord and Savior*. Furthermore, it is not stated that one must understand the manner in which Christ's death atoned for man's sins. His atonement is effective for his believing followers whether they understand it or not. The closest thing to mentioning the atonement in evangelism is found in Acts 8, where it says that Philip began his message with the text in Isaiah 53 that the Ethiopian official was reading. Elsewhere in Acts, the death and resurrection of Christ is presented as an act of power that demonstrates that Jesus is *the Christ Messiah*; it is the sign of Jonah that Jesus foretold, but it is not generally proclaimed as a sacrifice for sins or as a punishment for sins. Its redemptive value is explained to people after they have believed, as seen in the Epistles and in John's writings (e.g., John 11:50-51; 1 John 1:7; 2:2; 4:10; Rev 1:5).<sup>5</sup>

These doctrines about the deity of Jesus and his substitutionary punishment are wonderful parts of the Good News, and it is worthwhile discussing them with seekers, as Paul demonstrated in Romans. But the overwhelming Biblical witness is that although these doctrines are important for the disciple to understand, an understanding of them is not required for salvation. If we tell people that they cannot be saved until they know and have been convinced of these additional doctrines, then we are creating obstacles for them. (Jesus warned us about that.) How can they understand these things before they are born again? God's prevenient grace is sufficient to convict people that they should accept Christ, but they really need the Holy Spirit to go further, and that is not received in full until one actually receives Christ as *Lord and Savior*.

## Passages Exemplifying Sufficient Beliefs

The main passages are presented below, in Biblical order, for the reader to examine. (I would encourage the readers, if they have not already done so, to read my article on the Messianic titles in *IJFM* Vol. 17:1, pages 39-50 before reading the Scriptures below.) These passages were chosen, not just because they gave names to Jesus or talked of someone's faith, but because in some way they indicated criteria for salvation with regard to faith in Christ Jesus. The focus is on saving faith, not faith to be fruitful or move mountains, nor on beliefs about other issues. Statements about Jesus are included only if they bear on the issue of beliefs essential for salvation. Criteria such as repentance and baptism are not included unless they bear on what one must believe about Jesus. For example, in the long ending to Mark it says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). This verse teaches salvation by faith, but it does



not mention *what one must believe* about Jesus, and therefore is not included.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus tells the woman in Luke 7:50 that her faith has saved her, but the content of the faith is not mentioned (although it must have been directed towards Jesus). In Luke 10:20 he assures his disciples that their "names are written in heaven" but there is no accompanying statement of what they believed.

[NB: It would not be useful to present this list of passages to an inquirer. These verses use technical terms that need explanation, and they have been removed from their contexts. Seekers need to be exposed to extended passages of Scripture, so that it can work its powerful grace in their hearts and minds. These verses are presented so that you, the Christian worker, can thoughtfully examine them, preferably in their original contexts.]

But the centurion answered him, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard

him, he marveled, and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; be it done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment. (Matt. 8:8-13)

[The thief on the cross] "said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'" (Lk 23:42-43) [i.e., the thief believed that Jesus is Christ the King]

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:14-16) [titles equivalent to 'Lord Christ']

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many Christian  
workers is that after  
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everything changes.  
Their old objections  
begin to melt away as  
they embrace their  
Savior for everything  
He is.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24 and 6:29; 16:30). [One is required to believe that Jesus is whoever he says he is.]

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:68-70) [In Acts 4:30 Jesus is called God's Holy Servant.]

'for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.<sup>6</sup>' They said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus said to them, 'Even what I have told you from the beginning.<sup>7</sup> ... When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, ...' As he spoke thus, many believed in him. (John 8:24-30).

[Jesus asked the blind man he had healed] "Do you believe in the Son of man?" He answered, 'And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you.' He said, 'Lord, I believe'; and he worshiped him." (John 9:35-37)

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world." (John 11:25-27)

but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)

Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:36-38)

the Holy and Righteous One ... the Author of life ... his Christ ... the Christ appointed for you, Jesus... God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness." ... But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand. (Acts 3:14, 4:4)

But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12)

You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), (Acts 10:36)10... And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. (Acts 10:42-44) ... "... God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ ... " (Acts 11:17)

And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. (Acts 16:31-33)<sup>9</sup>

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead. But some men joined him and believed....” (Acts 17:30-34)

When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. (Acts 18:27-28)

testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:21)

And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 19:4-5)

if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

[We] know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified. (Galatians 2:16) .... I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

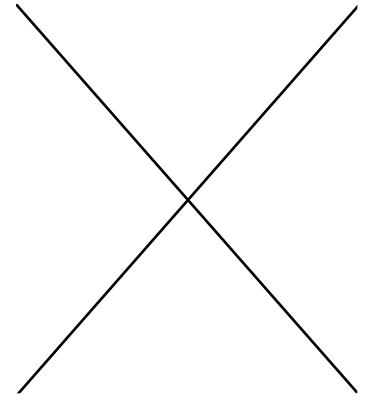
Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. .... not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; (Philippians 3:8-9)

Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the parent loves the child. (1 John 5:1) .... Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:5)

The reader can see that salvation is offered to those who put their faith in Jesus as their *Lord Messiah, the Christ*, where ‘Christ’ means the *Savior-King sent by God*. Their faith in Jesus as their Lord the Christ can be expressed using a number of different Messianic titles. These include *the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world, the Son of Man, the Lord*, and others. All of these Messianic titles refer to the roles of Christ. There is no statement that one must believe Jesus is the Lamb of God or Image or Word or Wisdom of God incarnate or even that he is God himself incarnate. There is no requirement for belief in the virgin birth nor the Trinity or other such teachings. There is no statement saying that people must use one particular title for Jesus in order to be saved. They must simply receive him as *their Lord and Savior*, an act which also implies repentance from what is contrary to his lordship. These other doctrines although true and important, can make the Gospel more appealing in many cases, but we should not confuse importance with necessity.<sup>10</sup>

## Passages Implying Sufficient Faith but Lacking Details

In the Gospels, Jesus calls people to trust him as sent from God and become his disciples, and this seems to be the basis for their salvation. Their names are written in



heaven and theirs is the kingdom. These passages present the Gospel but do not answer our specific question. There are also a number of passages where the "name" of Jesus is proclaimed and where the context suggests that belief in this "name" should be sufficient grounds for saving faith, without saying as much. Some of these are as follows:

And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11)

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel." (Luke 2:26-32)

And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and

we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:41-42)

Some passages affirm the salvation of those whose lives show that they have accepted Jesus as *their Lord*.

And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. (Matthew 19:29)

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25; cf. 10:37-39)

### **Does Salvation Precede Understanding?**

It seems unlikely that many people would be able to understand the divinity of Christ before their minds have been regenerated and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. They need first to receive Christ personally as their Lord the Messiah, and then the Holy Spirit can help them understand His divine nature. Jesus hinted at this when He said, I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.... He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:12-14) ... the Spirit of truth ... will bear witness to me (John 15:26)

Paul said as much when he wrote, "And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit." (1 Cor. 2:13)

Jesus accepted his disciples and the thief on the cross because they accepted

Him as *Christ their Lord* That was enough. Although Jesus' disciples marveled at His God-likeness, they did not understand His divinity or his being the Word until they had received the Holy Spirit.

I am not suggesting that we should not present the whole work and person of Christ, only that we should not tell people that they cannot be saved until they understand and accept it all. Why not? Because this is not the way the Bible does it. If we do say it then it puts up obstacles which will discourage many people from accepting Christ by telling them they don't qualify. Seekers struggle with these issues, especially Muslims, and they get sidetracked by them from the central issue—their relationship with Christ. If seekers reach an impasse on these issues but believe that Jesus really is God's provision as Lord and Savior, then it is best to encourage them to put those other issues on the shelf for a time and simply pray to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior. The experience of many Christian workers is that after the seekers accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, everything changes. Their old objections begin to melt away, sometimes rapidly, and they embrace their Savior for everything he is, whether they understand it all or not. As they attend to the Word and prayer and fellowship, the Holy Spirit opens their eyes to an increasing understanding and belief in the more difficult doctrines.

### **Passages that Exemplify Insufficient Belief**

There are also Scriptures that describe what is insufficient for salvation. Usually this has to do with refusal to accept Jesus as Lord, even if lip service is paid to him. That is to say, there is no relational faith, even if there might be some belief on which such a faith could have been founded. Basically, those who reject the King cannot be in the Kingdom:

Not everyone who says to Me "Lord, Lord" shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess, ... and come, follow Me. (Lk 18:23; cf. Mt 19:21)<sup>11</sup>

But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me. (Luke 19:27).

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him. (John 3:36)

And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people. (Acts 3:23)

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There is no greater disservice one can render to people than to tell them they are saved when they are not—that they can belong to the kingdom of God while refusing to become subjects of the King.

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 3-4)

## The Importance of Belief in Jesus' Resurrection

If Jesus died but did not rise, then he could hardly be "Lord of all." As Paul said, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor 15:14). So after the ascension of Jesus to the throne in heaven, faith in his saving, Messianic lordship generally required faith in his resurrection as well:

The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:30-31; cf. Acts 2:32-33)

if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9) [repeated from above]

Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

## Additional Theological Formulations

The presentations of the Gospel found in the Scriptures are all Christocentric; they focus on the role of Jesus *as Savior and Lord*. By contrast some modern traditions in evangelism are quite anthropocentric—they focus on the human condition and on the benefits of salvation. As for the minimal facts about Jesus which one must believe in order to be able to accept Him with a saving faith, most books on systematic theology and soteriology fail to say anything, Murray and Hodge being notable exceptions. Hoekema (1989), in his book on soteriology, provides just one sentence on this topic, and that sentence gives the traditional anthropocentric focus on human sinfulness and redemption:

We must have enough knowledge to realize that we are sinners who need redemption, that we cannot save ourselves but that only Christ can redeem us from sin and from the wrath of God, and that Christ died and arose for us. (142)

MacArthur (1988) concludes his book on soteriology with a much fuller statement that emphasizes acceptance of Christ as Lord:

This, then, is the gospel we are to proclaim: That Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate, humbled Himself to die on our behalf. Thus He became the sinless sacrifice to pay the penalty of our guilt. He rose from the dead to declare with power that He is Lord over all, and He offers eternal life freely to sinners who will surrender to Him in humble, repentant faith. (210)

This last statement is more Christocentric; it mentions the facts one must believe about Jesus, including His lordship, and it mentions the saving act of faith one must take on the basis of these facts. It also mentions facts which are Biblical but not basic to the Gospel; they are true and beneficial to know but belief in them is not a prerequisite to saving faith. These include the divinity of Christ and the penal substitutionary sacrifice accomplished by the death of Christ.

By contrast, the articles of faith listed in 1 Timothy 3:16 focus entirely on Christ, who is the subject of every clause.

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion:  
He was manifested in the flesh,  
[i.e., his incarnation]  
Vindicated in the Spirit, [i.e., his resurrection]  
Seen by angels,  
Preached among the nations,  
Believed on in the world,  
Taken up in glory. [i.e., his ascension]

This creed-like statement makes little mention of Christ's divinity<sup>12</sup> or death or substitutionary sacrifice. What it does mention is the vindication of His claim to be the Lord Messiah which occurred with His resurrection and His ascension to His throne in glory. His exalted position as Lord is implied by these statements.<sup>13</sup>

## In Conclusion

It could be said that the Gospel's message concerning getting saved is very simple and does not require one to have a great depth of theological understanding. That may come afterwards, but it is not a prerequisite for salvation. What is required is simply to put one's faith personally in *Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah*, meaning *one's Lord and Savior*. Saving faith, in both its propositional and relational aspects, is simply saying "Yes" to Jesus. After that there can be growth in the Christian life and understanding.

## Endnotes

1. Please see footnote 5.
2. It is interesting to note that in the Eastern tradition of Christianity, it is the resurrection which has always been considered the key salvific event. But Protestantism is much more rooted in the Western (later on Roman Catholic) tradition.
3. "Therefore, it is clearly contrary to the New Testament evidence to speak about the possibility of having true saving faith without having any repentance for sin. It is also contrary to the New Testament to speak about the possibility of someone accepting Christ "as Savior" but not "as Lord," if that means simply depending on him for salvation but not committing oneself to forsake sin and to be obedient to Christ from that point on" Grudem 1994:714. See MacArthur (1988) for a thorough discussion of the need for personal acceptance of the lordship of Christ.
4. Biblical quotations are quoted from the Revised Standard Version, 2nd edition 1971, except where otherwise indicated.
5. In general the apostles present the death of Jesus as a perfect and glorious obedience to God (as in Jn. 12:32, Phil. 2:8, Heb. 2:9-10), as an ensnarement of the devil (Heb. 2:14, 1 Cor. 2:6-8, Col. 2:15), and as the perfect sacrifice, both as a propitiation acceptable to God (as in Rom. 3:25 ff; Eph. 5:2) and as a sac-

rificial passover lamb with which God sealed the new covenant and saved those to whom the blood was applied (as in 1 Cor 5:7; 11:25 ; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; cf. Ex. 12:5). Most of them did not explicitly mention Jesus bearing the full punishment due to sinners for their sins, although we can see it suggested in Col. 2:13-14 and Heb. 9:28. In many passages Paul describes Jesus death as a sacrifice but not as a punishment, and it is Christ's lordship and resurrection that continues to be significant for saving faith (Rom. 10:9). In the Gospel of Luke, 24:7; 25-27; 45-47, Jesus presents his sufferings as a fulfillment of Scripture, without elaborating on the purpose for those suffering, but in Luke 22:20 and parallels he describes his death as a covenant sacrifice. John quotes the Baptist calling Jesus "the Lamb of God," which evokes ideas of blamelessness and sacrifice. John relates Jesus to the Passover lamb sacrifice by highlighting the fact that Jesus was slain at the time when the Passover lamb was sacrificed (John 18:28; 19:14, 30-31) and by identifying Jesus' death with the Passover lamb (John 19:36). John's frequent use of the term 'Lamb' in Revelation is clearly sacrificial and most commentators assume that image is that of the Passover lamb. The main scripture supporting the substitutionary punishment theory of the atonement is Isaiah 53, which Peter refers to in 1 Peter 2:21-25 and which Philip used (Acts 20:28). One is left with the conclusion that the death of Jesus fulfilled a number of purposes.

6. NIV: "if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." See the discussion about this passage in the introduction.
7. Note that what Jesus had called himself from the beginning is 'the Son of Man'.
8. While there were many kings in the Roman empire, there had been only one lord—Caesar. Now Jesus was recognized to be—not just "King of the Jews"—but "Lord of all." In the context this is based on Psalm 110:1, the most quoted verse in the New Testament: "The LORD says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.'" "LORD" is of course a translation of God's name in Hebrew, YHWH, but in the New Testament "Lord" becomes a Messianic title.
9. MacArthur (1988:28) judges that Acts 16:31 and Romans 10:9 provide "the two clearest statements on the way of salvation in all of Scripture...." He goes on to add Acts 2:36 as well.
10. Those who deny what they call "lordship salvation" usually claim that "accepting Jesus as Lord" would require perfect obedience, which is not possible. I do not know, however, of any proponent of "lordship salvation" who claims that Jesus cannot be one's Lord unless one is sinless. Jesus compared himself with a shepherd who cares for his sheep and rescues them when they go astray, but he did say they were sheep, that they belonged to him. Accepting Jesus as Lord means acknowledging that he is one's rightful king and trustworthy master. It means recognizing that "You are not your own; you were bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19-20), and so you owe Jesus your loyalty and obedience. It does not mean that one is always in perfect harmony with Jesus, for that is the goal of sanctification.  
  
We need to heed the Bible's warning about "ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 4). Jude says they are designated for condemnation. Jesus, speaking a parable about the rewards and punishments that will accompany his second coming, said, "But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me." (Luke 19:27) There is no greater disservice one can render to people than to tell them they are saved when they are not and that they can belong to the kingdom while refusing to become subjects of the king. The offer of the Kingdom is pure grace, and acceptance into it requires no works; it only requires that one say "Yes" to Jesus, and even that is a work of grace. But one does need to say "Yes".
11. The case of the rich ruler warrants further comment. He was trusting in his own obedience to God's commandments, but he lacked a relationship to Jesus. The Lord said



he lacked one thing, but was that to give away his possessions or to become a follower of Jesus? Looking at the Gospels as a whole, we see that what is necessary is a relationship to Jesus. The man's refusal to obey Jesus is evidence that he refused to accept Jesus as his Lord.

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12. Actually, this passage only mentions his preexistence, which was expected of the Messiah anyway, but later manuscripts made the incarnation explicit by changing "he" to "God" in the first clause.

13. Romans 1:1-4 elaborates on the theme that the resurrection proves that Jesus is "Son of God ... Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul may have intended us to understand the resurrection and ascension together, as in Hebrews 1. R.C. Sproul writes that he has come to the conclusion that the ascension is the most important event in the Gospel account (1999:101). Of course, all of these elements were vital. There could be no ascension of Christ to his throne without the resurrection, no resurrection without his death, no death without his birth, no birth without his incarnational descent from heaven.

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Some conservative Protestants believe that one need only trust Jesus as Lord and Savior to be saved. Most conservatives add to the above requirement that one must first repent of one's sins. Most progressive Christians downplay salvation, interpreting many biblical passages on the topics of sin and salvation as poetry. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that a person is initially saved if they are baptized, that salvation can be lost by committing a mortal sin later in life, but that salvation can be regained through the church's Sacrament of Penance & Reconciliation. One might lo What Must One Believe about Jesus for Salvation? There seems to exist considerable disagreement among field workers about what one must actually believe about Jesus in order to put faith in him sufficient for salvation. Here the author describes beliefs necessary and unnecessary for saving faith. These are based upon a list of Scripture passages that exemplify sufficient as well as insufficient faith in Christ the Lord. by Rick Brown hile