

What Must I Do?

Genuine conversion to Christ is never casual or easy. In fact, in many cases it is an act of desperation by one who has finally awakened to his dire condition.

*“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, **what shall we do?**’” (Ac. 2:37).*

*“So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, **what do You want me to do?**’” (Ac. 9:6).*

*“Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, **what must I do to be saved?**’” (Ac. 16:29-30).*



The parties in all three of these accounts—pious Jews, a rabid persecutor, and a Roman soldier—are quite different, but there are some common elements that reward the student who is careful to sift through their stories.

All three accounts involve individuals who were confronted by information that turned their world upside down. The Jews on Pentecost were given incontrovertible evidence that the Jesus they had helped crucify was, in fact, their long-awaited Messiah. They were not merely murderers, but murderers of the Son of God. They had made a terrible mistake, and Peter’s sermon was an intellectual two-by-four that shattered their comfortable piety.

Saul was committed to destroying the nascent Jesus movement, but on the road to Damascus he was confronted in dramatic fashion by the very Jesus whom he opposed. That experience opened his eyes to the fact that he was not just wrong but fighting the God whom he claimed to honor.

The Philippian jailor was just another profane Roman soldier who had no interest in religion—until an earthquake and a near-suicide attempt shook him out of his lethargy. Life got serious for this man real fast.

The information may have come to these people in different ways, but in all three cases the message was the same: The assumptions upon which they had built their lives had been exposed as lies, and they were hanging by a thread over a dark, terrifying abyss from which there was no escape.

So how did they respond to this shocking new reality? The same way any of us would in a similar situation: they cried out for help. In all three stories, “What must I do?” was not the inquiry of a curiosity seeker, but the anguished cry of someone who knew they were in deep trouble and were desperate to find a way out.

The responses given to all three parties—although tailored to the unique circumstances of each—involved a common set of instructions: acknowledge Jesus as Lord, commit in their heart to a changed life (repentance), and be baptized in water (Ac. 2:38; 22:16; 16:31-34). Their obedience resulted in “new” human beings, people who had a fresh perspective on life that filled them with joy and purpose as recipients of divine grace.

These accounts of conversion remind us that becoming a Christian is much more than declaring a religious affiliation. It is a life-changing experience that often involves deep soul-searching and difficult choices. It is something that we *do*, a conscious decision that affects every aspect of our heart and life. Our response to the gospel does not earn us anything. On the contrary, it is the outpouring of gratitude to One who owes us nothing, yet died to give us an abundant life. What will *you* do with that offer?

— David King