

but instead being consigned to hell. How terribly sad!

Further, I can imagine our religious neighbors finding themselves in that situation respecting their treatment of our Lord's words in Mark 16:16. I can hear friends, neighbors, family members and coworkers objecting and attempting to negotiate with Jesus at the late date of being before the very Judgment Seat of Christ. "Lord, Lord, You fail to understand! We voted on that. It is no longer, **'He who believes and is baptized will be saved....'** but now it is, **'He who believes is saved, and if he wants to, he can be baptized.'**" Really, how do you think that is going to work out for them?

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said, **"He who believes and is baptized will be saved..."** That message is for non-Christians, and teaching them how they can become the children of God — how their sins can be removed. However, other passages address how sins that creep into the lives of Christians can be removed. The apostle Peter told a new Christian named Simon who had committed sin, *"Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you"* (Acts 8:22). Likewise, the apostle John also

wrote about how sin in the lives of Christians can be removed. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

There are two (2) laws of pardon in the Christian Age in which we live: one is for the non-Christian and one is for the Christian. A person cannot effect the removal of sin and becoming a child of God by trying to misapply the second law of pardon to the non-Christian. By the same token, Christians do not need to be baptized — part of the first law of pardon — again to combat sins in their lives. Salvation can be summarized for non-Christians and Christians by correctly applying the appropriate Scriptures to each group. *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth**"* (2 Timothy 2:15).

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Essentially, the biblical plan of salvation for today can be summarized, encapsulated and briefly stated in just nine (9) words – one short sentence. Numerous additional New Testament Scriptures could be marshalled respecting the plan of salvation for non-Christians, but just nine words in one little sentence reveal enough information to identify the point at which one's sins are removed.

Furthermore, the scope of the authority of the Speaker – **Jesus Christ**, who made the nine-word statement – encompasses heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18 NKJV). Our Lord and Savior said, and it is recorded, in Mark 16:16 (NKJV), **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved....”** One has to marvel at the simplicity of the declaration, which is equivalent in simplicity to $1 + 2 = 3$. **Belief + baptism = salvation!** The plan of salvation could not be any simpler than that, and any thinking mind can easily understand it, too. Frankly, someone would have to have the wrong kind of help to misunderstand that straightforward statement of Jesus.

Some people mistakenly make an unwarranted distinction between the words of Jesus and the speeches and writings of the apostles of Christ and other writers of the New Testament. Actually, God and the Holy Spirit are behind both the words of our Lord (John 12:49,50) and the writings in the rest of the New Testament: *“...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Peter 1:21) See also Matthew 10:19,20.

Nevertheless, *Red Letter Edition* Bibles highlight the words of Jesus Christ in red letters, and therefore, Mark 16:16 appears in red letters: **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved....”** By everyone's estimate, among those who have any regard whatsoever for the Bible, there is no higher authority than the words of Jesus Christ Himself — in red letters or in black and white.

Despite the indisputable fact that Jesus said, **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved....”** most people today read it differently than what our Lord uttered. They read it as though our Lord said, **“He who believes is saved, and if he wants to, he can be baptized.”** That is *not* what the Son of God said! Think

about that contrast – really, that *contradiction* – for a moment.

Someday, every soul will appear before the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ to answer for his or her deeds and to hear either a sentence to a devil's hell or an invitation into heaven. *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Jesus Christ pictured the judgment scene in Matthew 7:21-23, which reads: *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew [approved of] you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”*

Remarkably and lamentably, some are pictured in that text of trying to negotiate with our Lord, but it did not work. I cannot imagine a sadder passage any place in the Bible than that of sincere souls arriving before the judgment seat of Jesus, expecting to be ushered into heaven,