

What Is Essential for Salvation?

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Have you ever wondered what the essential elements are that make someone a child of God?

Is it:

- Whether they profess Jesus as their Savior?
- Whether they were baptized in the right way?
- What day they attend worship services
- How they dress?
- Whether they are pro-life or pro-choice?
- Whether they believe in the Trinity or reject the Trinity?
- Whether they avoid alcohol and pork?

Consider each element:

- **Are there people who have professed Jesus as their Savior but who will ultimately be lost?** According to Jesus, many of the unsaved will claim salvation in His name: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them

plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' " (Matthew 7:21-23 NIV84).

- **Will there be people in heaven who weren't baptized in water?** Consider the thief on the cross to whom Jesus promised salvation. The man died without water baptism, as did all those who were saved in Old Testament times.
- **Have there ever been people who observed the right day of worship yet had un-Christlike hearts?** Those who crucified Christ wanted Him taken down from the cross before sunset so that the Sabbath wouldn't be violated.
- **Have there ever been people who wore Christian clothing yet have done things Christ would never do?** Some people have worn overtly religious garb—clothing designed to declare their devotion to God—and yet have molested and abused the innocent.
- **Can a person be pro-life yet act in a way Jesus never would?** Some have professed Christianity yet have murdered abortion doctors or bombed abortion clinic. Is taking a political stance and advocating for a particular legislative policy a requirement for salvation?
- **Must we fully comprehend the nature of the Godhead to be saved?** Many who burned people at the stake did so while believing in the Trinity.
- **Will we be lost because we ate things the Bible says we shouldn't eat?** David gave food meant only for priests to his soldiers, yet he will be in heaven. Pharisees who never touched pork plotted the murder of Jesus.

Doesn't it seem that these particular elements can sometimes put us into a state of fear? *What if I'm not doing it right?* We become afraid of getting into legal trouble with God, of having an act of unforgiveable sin put onto our account, of losing eternal life. Yet when fear is the primary motivation for our behavior, what happens to us? We become insecure, which will result in conflict when other Christians practice their faith differently. We object, find fault, put down, and seek to prove wrong the "others." As a result, Christianity falls into division, disagreement, and hostility.

But the Christianity that Jesus taught was one of unity, an experience in which divisions fade away and people enter into loving fellowship despite their differences. Jesus broke down dividing barriers: He spoke to women, touched lepers, ate with tax-collectors, and socialized with prostitutes; He visited Samaritans, defended and accepted the poor, and broke the Sabbath rules of the religious authorities so that He could do good works, like healing untouchables.

What was different about Jesus than the divisive Christianity we see today? Jesus loved perfectly, operating only upon God's design protocols (laws) for life. He didn't approach life with a rules-first perspective; rather, because He understood how life is built by God to operate—in a never-ending circle of selfless love—He served selflessly even those who were breaking the rules.

Jesus came to lead humanity back into harmony with God's design for life, away from fear-based rule-keeping and toward love-first behavior. He understood that acts of sin deviate from God's design—causing pain, suffering, and death—so He avoided behaviors, not religious rules, that would take Him out of harmony with God's design. He often broke religious rules in order to bring others into harmony with God's design.

Jesus knew behavioral modification could not save anyone, because mere rule-breaking isn't the real problem. He knew that the problem sin caused was a heart that was selfish and fear-ridden—a condition of being outside of God's design of love. Jesus knew that human beings need to be renewed, regenerated, recreated; we need to be reborn, to have our hearts of stone removed, to have hearts of flesh put in, to have our hearts circumcised by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus knew that we need to experience the truth of God's love in order to win us back to trust in God, so that we will choose to open our hearts and experience the healing power of the Holy Spirit and then live that love in how we treat others.

Thus, the Bible teaches:

- "Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10 NIV84).
- "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right" (James 2:8 NIV84).
- " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Only by returning to the truth of our Creator God, who built life to operate upon the protocols of love, and rejecting the lie that God's law works like human law, a system of imposed rules that require imposed penalties, will trust in God truly be restored. Then, when hearts open in trust to God, the Spirit will come in, and a miracle will happen: Fear will be replaced by love, selfishness will be expelled by selflessness, cruelty will be purged by kindness, shame and guilt will be eradicated by peace and contentment, callousness will give way to tenderness, rudeness will turn to kindness, impulsiveness will turn to patience, and divisions will evaporate as people renewed in love experience genuine unity of heart, of principle, of motive, of character—people who celebrate the richness of their diversity in culture, race, nationality, social status, education, and abilities.

What is the essential element that makes someone a child of God? To be renewed in heart to love like God loves and to live in harmony with how our Creator God has built His universe to operate. All of this is made possible only through our Savior Jesus Christ, who took our terminal condition upon Himself in order to overcome it, to eradicate it, and to restore the species human back to God's ideal.

I invite you to reject the false human-law lie that has infected Christianity and made it appear that we are in legal trouble with God and that God is a cruel dictator who is required to punish rule-breaking. Instead, worship our Creator God who built His universe to operate on love and who understands that we are all struggling with a condition of heart and mind with which we were born, a condition that needs healing, not punishing, and who sent His Son to procure the remedy that will heal and restore all who trust Him.

I invite you to enter God's universe of love!