

## 7. What do Latter-day Saints believe a person must do to be saved?

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Joseph Smith wrote in 1842: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (Articles of Faith 1:3). From an LDS perspective, no person who comes to earth is outside the reach of Christ’s power to save, no soul beyond the pale of mercy and grace. No one came to earth either predestined to be saved or denied the right to the same. God is no respecter of persons, “but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34–35).

### **Immortality and Eternal Life**

In the Pearl of Great Price are recorded the following words of God to Moses: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). This is a capsule statement, a distillation and summary of the work of redemption in Christ. Mormons believe there are two types of salvation made available through the atonement of Jesus Christ—universal and individual. All who receive a physical body—whether they are good or bad, evil or righteous—will be resurrected (see 1 Corinthians 15:22; Alma 11:41). This universal salvation from physical death is the *immortality* spoken of in the book of Moses. It is salvation from the grave, or endless life. It is a universal gift.

Individual salvation is another matter. Though all salvation is made possible through the mercy and love of Christ, Mormons believe there are certain things individuals must do for divine grace to be fully activated in their lives. That is, they must willingly receive the Lord’s gift, which is freely given. People must come unto him—accept him as Lord and Savior, have faith on his name, repent of sin, be baptized, receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and strive to remain faithful to the end of their days. *Eternal life* comes to those who believe, obey, and endure to the end. Christ is “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). Eternal life is endless life, but it is also life with God. It is God’s life. It is the highest form of salvation.

### **Grace and Works**

Coming unto Christ represents a covenant, a two-way promise between God and man. Jesus Christ has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. He suffered and bled and died for us. He redeems us from sin. He offers to change our nature, to make us into new creatures (see 2 Corinthians 5:17; Mosiah 27:24–26). He rose from the dead and thereby opened the door for us to do the same at the appointed time. These things we could not do for ourselves; they are acts of mercy and grace. Our promise is to accept Christ as our Savior, be faithful to our covenants, obey his commandments, and endure to the end.

Latter-day Saints readily acknowledge that though our efforts to be righteous are *necessary*, they will never be *sufficient* to save us. Book of Mormon prophets thus explained that above and beyond all we can do, we are saved by the grace of Christ and that our most significant labor is to trust in and rely upon the merits and mercy and grace of the Holy Messiah (see 2 Nephi 10:24; 25:23; 2 Nephi 2:8; 31:19; Moroni 6:4).

Unfortunately, the theological debate over whether we are saved by grace or by works has continued for centuries. It is, as C. S. Lewis observed, “like asking which blade in a pair of scissors is most necessary.”<sup>30</sup> Few things would reveal the shallowness of one’s discipleship more than giving lip service to God while avoiding wholehearted obedience. True faith always results in faithfulness, faithful action (see James 2). On the other hand,

few things are more offensive to God than trusting solely in one's own works, relying upon one's own strength, and seeking to prosper through one's own genius.

## The Atonement of Christ

Christ is the source of our strength and our salvation. "How else could salvation possibly come?" asked Elder Bruce R. McConkie, a former apostle in the LDS Church. "Can man save himself? Can he resurrect himself? Can he create a celestial kingdom and decree his own admission thereto? Salvation must and does originate with God, and if man is to receive it, God must bestow it upon him, which bestowal is a manifestation of grace. . . . Salvation is in Christ and comes through his atonement."<sup>31</sup> Or as Elder Dallin H. Oaks, another Latter-day Saint apostle, observed: "Man unquestionably has impressive powers and can bring to pass great things by tireless efforts and indomitable will. But after all our obedience and good works, we cannot be saved from the effect of our sins without the grace extended by the atonement of Jesus Christ."<sup>32</sup>

Joseph Smith learned by revelation that the greatest blessings in the world to come are reserved for those who come unto Christ, accept his gospel, receive the necessary sacraments or ordinances, and remain true to their covenants. Those who do these things inherit the fulness of the glory of God (see D&C 76; 132:19). The Prophet Joseph later revealed the importance of temples as sacred places wherein the children of God can participate in ordinances that bind and seal families for time and all eternity (see D&C 131–32). The instruction and ordinances of the temple are remarkably Christ-centered and continue to provide the ever-needed reminder that without him we have no hope of peace and happiness here and no claim on eternal glory hereafter.

Words like *salvation*, *exaltation*, and *eternal life* are often used in LDS religious discourse. In essence, each of these words means the same thing, but each lays stress upon different aspects of the saved condition. The word *salvation* emphasizes one's saved condition, the deliverance from death and sin through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. *Eternal* is one of the names of God, and thus to possess eternal life is to enjoy God's life. The word *exaltation* lays stress upon the elevated and ennobled status of one who qualifies for the society of the redeemed and glorified in the celestial kingdom.

## Modern Revelation

Latter-day Saints rejoice in the knowledge of a plan of salvation that has come to them through modern prophets—vital knowledge of matters that continue to be debated in the Christian world, such as:

- **who we are—where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going after death;**
- **to what degree our faith in Christ must be manifest in our faithfulness to his commandments;**
- **the status of those who die without a knowledge of Christ and his gospel.**

Joseph Smith taught that for a man to be saved is to be "placed beyond the power of all his enemies."<sup>33</sup> Even though the ultimate blessings of salvation do not come until the next life, there is a sense in which people in this life may enjoy the assurance of salvation and the peace that accompanies that knowledge (see D&C 59:23). The Holy Spirit provides the "earnest of our inheritance," the promise or certification that we are on course and thus in line for full salvation in the world to come (see 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13–14). If we are doing all we can to cultivate the gifts of the Spirit, we are living in what might be called a saved condition. LDS Church president David O. McKay thus observed that "the gospel of Jesus Christ, as revealed to the Prophet Joseph

Smith, is in very deed, in every way, the power of God unto salvation. It is salvation *here*—here and now. It gives to every man the perfect life, here and now, as well as hereafter.”<sup>34</sup>

## Notes

30. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 129.

31. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–73), 2:499, 500.

32. In Conference Report, October 1988, 78.

33. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 301; see 297, 305.

34. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953), 6, emphasis in original; see Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:131; 8:124–25.