

The Truth About Salvation

By David Platt

Note: This article has been excerpted from [Follow Me](#), a small-group Bible Study by David Platt.

I have a friend—let’s call him John—whose first exposure to the concept of hell was during an episode of “Tom and Jerry” when he was young. During one particularly vivid scene, Tom was sent to hell for something bad he’d done to Jerry. What was intended to be a humorous cartoon ended up scaring John to death, and he later found himself at church talking with a man about what he’d seen.

The churchgoer looked at John and said, “Well, you don’t want to go to hell, do you?”

“No,” John responded.

“OK then,” the man said. “Pray this prayer after me. Dear Jesus ...”

John paused. After some awkward silence he realized he was supposed to repeat after the man. So he hesitantly responded, “Dear Jesus ...”

“I know I’m a sinner, and I know Jesus died on a cross for my sins,” the man said. John repeated his words.

“I ask You to come into my heart and save me from my sin,” the man said. Again, John echoed what he’d heard.

“Amen,” the man concluded. Then the man looked at John and said, “Son, you’re saved from your sins, and you don’t ever have to worry about hell again.”

Away from Me

Surely what that man told my friend in church that day wasn’t true. Surely this isn’t what it means to respond to Jesus’ invitation to follow Him—and yet these kinds of conversations are repeated year after year within the church.

Shouldn’t it alarm us that such simplistic pathways to Christianity are nowhere to be found in God’s Word? Shouldn’t we who follow Christ be concerned that the Scriptures contain no references to people asking Jesus into their hearts or reciting a prayer of salvation?

Yet this is exactly what multitudes of professing Christians have been encouraged to do. Worse, they've been assured that as long as they asked Jesus into their heart, invited Him into their life, prayed a prayer, raised their hand, signed a card, or walked an aisle, they're Christians, and their salvation is eternally secure.

It's a lie. With good intentions and a sincere desire to reach as many people as possible for Christ, we've subtly and deceptively minimized the magnitude of what it means to follow Jesus. As a result, multitudes of men and women at this moment think they're saved from their sins when they aren't. Scores of people around the world culturally identify themselves as Christians when biblically they aren't.

I realize these claims may be surprising for a lot of people, perhaps even offensive. You may be wondering: *Is it possible for a person to claim to be a Christian without actually knowing Christ? Could a large number of people really be completely ignorant of their own spiritual state?*

I assure you the answer to those questions is yes. You don't have to take my word for it. Instead, listen to the words of Jesus:

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

All people are prone to spiritual deception, including you and me. What we need to understand is that Jesus wasn't speaking about outsiders in Matthew 7. He wasn't talking about atheists, murderers, or people who've completely rebelled against the message of the gospel. No, He was talking about religious people. He was talking about good people who superficially associate themselves with Him and do good things—even to the point of driving out demons and performing miracles.

But they don't know Jesus.

It's possible to go through the motions of a Christian life without actually becoming a Christian—without experiencing salvation. That should scare us on a number of different levels.

Let's address this problem by focusing on a genuine relationship with Christ—on what happens when people really experience salvation. What does it look like when people die to themselves and find new life as followers of Jesus? What evidence follows that spiritual transaction?

We can answer those questions by examining the experiences of Jesus' first disciples. When we do, two words stand out: *repent* and *renounce*.

Repent

We've already seen the way Jesus called His first disciples in Matthew 4:18-22. But if we back up to the previous verse, we see the first words of Jesus' public ministry on earth: "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near' " (Matt. 4:17).

It's interesting that the very first word out of Jesus' mouth during His public ministry was *repent*. The same was true of John the Baptist (see Matt. 3:1-12), and Peter preached a message of repentance during the first Christian sermon after being filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (see Acts 2:36-41).

Repentance is a rich biblical term that signifies an elemental transformation in someone's mind, heart, and life. When people repent, they turn from walking in one direction to running in the opposite direction. From that point forward they think differently, believe differently, feel differently, love differently, and live differently.

Fundamentally, repentance involves renouncing a former way of life in favor of a new way of life.

Renounce

Dictionary definitions of the word *renounce* include "to give up or put aside voluntarily" and "to repudiate; disown." To renounce something is to commit a strong, decisive action. The term carries the weight of finality. That's precisely what Jesus wanted to communicate when He spoke these words to His disciples: "Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33, ESV).

Contrary to what many believe today, Jesus wasn't speaking metaphorically or exaggerating when He made that statement. He meant what He said: that in order to follow Him, we must voluntarily relinquish control over every aspect of our lives. That includes our possessions, our comfort, our careers, our family, our position, our sin, and even ourselves.

That's what Jesus asked of His first disciples, and He asks the same of us today.

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