

“What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?”

by David Stewart

One of the greatest questions an individual can ever ask is “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” The answer to this question is extremely important because it touches upon eternity. Death is certain, as the author of Hebrews pointed out: “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). So how can a person prepare to stand before God? How can one know he is right with God? How can an individual know he will live with God throughout eternity in heaven, rather than with Satan in hell?

No person can be righteous before God on his own merit. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). No one can do anything by himself to remove the guilt and consequences of his sin. We all deserve spiritual death—that is, to be eternally separated from God. “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a). The good news, however, is that Jesus endured our punishment for us and can bring us back to God. The rest of the passages previously cited read, “. . . and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24); “. . . but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23b).

It is because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection from the dead that we may be saved. Jesus firmly stated, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Later, the apostle Peter boldly proclaimed, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

God offers us the precious gift of eternal life—something we could never earn or deserve by our own merit. This gift of love is available to the whole world (John 3:16-18; 1 John 2:2). How do we receive this salvation found in Christ? The answer to this vital question is found throughout the teaching of the New Testament. Let us consider our response to God’s saving grace.

1) We must believe in Jesus. Faith in Christ and his sacrifice on the cross is essential to our eternal salvation. Jesus warned his hearers, “If you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins” (John 8:24). The gospel “is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Saving faith includes not only intellectual assent, but also trust and obedience (John 14:15; James 2:14-26). We must yield our lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ, seeking to obey and please him in every way (Matthew 7:21-23).

2) We must repent of our sins. The essence of repentance is turning away from evil and back to God. We need to feel remorse for the sins we have committed: “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (2 Corinthians 7:10). We must resolve to die to sin and live for righteousness (Romans 6:11-14). This idea is summed up in the words of Jesus: “Go now

and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11). True repentance must be reflected in our actions (see Luke 19:8; Acts 19:18, 19).

3) *We must confess our faith in Christ.* Closely tied with believing in Jesus is our profession of faith in him. Prior to baptism, early converts made a confession: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). Timothy had made the “good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12). The apostle Paul wrote, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9, 10). Such a profession of faith should always be on the lips of Christians (Matthew 10:32, 33).

4) *We must be baptized into Christ.* Jesus himself proclaimed that one must be baptized to be saved: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16; see Matthew 28:18-20; John 3:5). On the day the church was established, Peter told his hearers who believed in Jesus, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Throughout Acts, people responded to the gospel in faith, repentance, and immersion in water (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 13, 38; 9:18; 10:47, 48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16). Whenever this happened, the blood of Christ cleansed them from sin, they were given the indwelling Holy Spirit, and they were added to the church (2:38, 41, 47). The same blessings are available for us even today!

5) *We must live faithful Christian lives.* The Christian life begins at baptism and is a journey with Christ throughout life—until we die or the Lord comes again. Jesus calls us to live for him every moment of this journey: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

As we walk each day, we will stumble and fall. The apostle John reassures us, however, that “if we walk in the light, as [God] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). John added, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Christ calls us to be faithful to him no matter what the cost: “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

Have you received the gift of God’s salvation in the way he has commanded in the New Testament? Are you living as a faithful Christian in Christ’s church?

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