



Discussions with My Friend: An Introduction to the Gospel of Jesus Christ By David Stewart

Chapter 40: What does God Require?

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An understanding of what God requires is essential for believers. Various faiths and denominations teach widely different doctrines that have been at the center of religious debate for centuries. Those without a correct understanding of God's expectations are at a serious disadvantage, as it is difficult to achieve that which one does not strive for or recognize as a necessary goal. Scriptures teach clearly what God requires for us to be saved.

Do Many Paths Lead to God?

Some claim that "many paths lead to God" and that an individual can achieve salvation by following basically good principles of any religion, making the choice of denomination insignificant. Certainly those who live up to an incomplete set of principles tower spiritually over those who are in possession of greater truth but do not live by it ([Jacob 3:5-9](#)). Christ teaches that with greater knowledge comes greater accountability: "But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" ([Luke 12:48](#)).

The Book of Mormon teaches that "the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true" ([Alma 29:8](#)). Those of other faiths who honor their consciences and earnestly seek truth are able to use the positive aspects of their faith as stepping stones to acceptance of the restored Church of Jesus Christ.

The claims of thousands of different churches and faiths cannot all simultaneously be correct. While other faiths offer different degrees of truth, they lack the fullness of the gospel found in the "only true and living church on the face of all the earth" ([D&C 1:30](#)). God is a God of order and has established laws by which all will be judged. A variety of paths may allow a person to avoid some egregious sins and make limited spiritual progress, but lack the full truths and ordinances necessary for us to more fully follow Christ's commandments.

For those who wish to do right, there are great spiritual advantages to having the full gospel. Paul explains that the advantage of those with access to God's word through living prophets is "much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" ([Romans 3:2](#)). Christ proclaimed: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" ([John 14:6](#)). He taught: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide [is] the gate, and broad [is] the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait [is] the gate, and narrow [is] the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" ([Matthew 7:13-14](#)). If our goal is something other than eternal life, any path will do, but there is only one path that leads back to our Heavenly Father.

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False Doctrines on Salvation

"The Billy Graham Christian Worker's Handbook," a manual widely used by many Protestant and Evangelical faiths, claims that all those who state that they accept Christ are saved, and that no one is authorized to add anything to this requirement for salvation. Those literate in scripture find clear teachings contradicting such Evangelical and "born again" views that trivialize or reject God's commandments.

First, the scriptures are replete with statements that sinners will not inherit the kingdom of God. Christ taught that obedience to God's laws is required for salvation. He taught: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of

heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" ([Matthew 7:21](#)). Those who hear his words but do not do them are likened to a foolish man building on the sand whose house fell when the floods and winds came ([Matthew 7:24-27](#)). We will be judged by our actions, words, and thoughts. Christ taught, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" ([Matthew 16:27](#)). The Savior speak repeatedly of a reward for good deeds ([Matthew 5:12](#), [6:1-4](#), [10:41](#), [Luke 6:35](#), etc.) He noted, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" ([Matthew 5:20](#)). Jesus taught, "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" ([Matthew 12:36-37](#)). Paul admonished members of the Corinthian congregation who had already accepted Christ: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, or thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" ([1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#)).

Second, Evangelical beliefs neglect the power of repentance. While all have fallen short of the glory of God ([Romans 3:23](#)) and we sometimes make mistakes despite our best efforts, the power of the atonement allows us to repent. It is only through Christ's grace that repentance is possible, as otherwise the law would exact full punishment. To deny the necessity and power of repentance is to deny Christ's word ([Matthew 4:17](#), [9:13](#), etc.).

Finally, the belief that salvation is an event achieved by claiming to accept Christ rather than a lifelong process contradicts the repeated teachings of the Savior that only those who "endure to the end" are saved ([Matthew 10:22](#), [24:13](#)). Those who initially receive the word under favorable circumstances but fall away when trials arise will not be saved ([Matthew 13:3-30](#)).

Much more is required to pass the final judgment than simply claiming to accept Christ as a one-time event. The reader can judge for himself or herself who is authorized to define the conditions of salvation -- Jesus Christ, or Billy Graham and other evangelicals. Christ taught: "Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me" ([John 5:39](#)).

Life is a Test

This life is a "probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead" ([Alma 12:24](#)). God tests us to see if we obey his word even under difficult circumstances that require great sacrifice: "we will prove them herewith, to see whether they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" ([Abraham 3:25](#)). Alma teaches: "I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed" ([Alma 34:33](#)).

Accountability

All those of accountable age will be judged according to their obedience to God's commandments. Alma states: "Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience" ([Alma 29:5](#)). With greater knowledge and opportunities comes greater accountability ([Luke 12:48](#)). Small children are not accountable and do not require baptism. Mormon instructs: "Behold I say unto you that this thing shall ye teach -- repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin; yea, teach parents that they must repent and be baptized, and humble themselves as their little children, and they shall all be saved with their little children ... But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world; if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable God, and a respecter to persons; for how many little children have died without baptism!" ([Moroni 8:10, 12](#)).

Faith and Works

Many Christian faiths praise Christ even as their adherents persist in sinful lifestyles. Knowledge of Christ alone will not save us if we do not exercise the faith to act in accordance with that knowledge. James wrote:

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" ([James 2:17-19](#)).

Believers may know perfectly well that Jesus Christ is the son of God, yet His atonement never becomes active in their lives unless they exercise the faith to follow His teachings and make the sacrifice that He has commanded. The hungry man may know of a great banquet, yet he is not nourished unless he attends and partakes. We may know of heaven with the "transcendent beauty of the gate through which the heirs of that kingdom will enter" and the "beautiful streets of that kingdom, which had the appearance of being paved with gold" ([D&C 137:2-4](#)), yet this knowledge does not profit us if our own lives are not in harmony with God's will. The fact that we must follow God's to receive salvation will does not in any way diminish Christ's atonement, as "it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" ([2 Nephi 25:23](#)). Even after we have done all that we can, we are still "unprofitable servants" ([Luke 17:10](#)) and salvation comes only through Christ's grace. Yet those who do not follow

God's will cannot receive of His full grace. The Lord declared: "whoso having knowledge, have I not commanded to repent?" ([D&C 29:49](#)).

Degrees of Salvation

Ancient and modern scripture teach that there are different degrees of salvation. Christ taught: "In my father's house are many mansions" ([John 14:2](#)). Paul taught: "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption" ([1 Corinthians 15:40-42](#)).

The degree to which we benefit from atonement will depend on our obedience. The term eternal life is used to describe only the highest degree of salvation, where families will be together and we will receive a fullness of joy.

Removing Barriers to God

When the rich young man asked Christ, "what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Christ replied: "if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." After answering that he had observed specific commandments, the young man asked: "what lack I yet?" Jesus replied: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me." The scripture records that the young man could not part with his possessions and went away sorrowing ([Matthew 19:16-21](#)).

It is not enough to avoid major sin; we must place Christ first in our lives. Many otherwise good people fall short of salvation because of being unwilling to give up a favorite sin or make a required sacrifice. The most important commandment for us is the one that we have the most trouble with, as if not overcome, it will limit our eternal progress. Jesus taught: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" ([Matthew 22:37-40](#)). When we love and serve God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, it is easy for us to make the necessary sacrifices.

Keep the Commandments

Christ taught: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" ([John 14:15](#)). Those who stray from the commandments grow cold and lose their love of God. Christ taught: "If you keep not my commandments, the love of the Father shall not continue with you, therefore you shall walk in darkness" ([D&C 95:12](#)).

Scriptures teach that "no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments" ([D&C 93:27](#)). The prophet Alma taught, "Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins? Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. Behold ye must prepare quickly; for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand, and such an one hath not eternal life. Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared; and I would that he should prepare quickly, for the hour is close at hand, and he knoweth not when the time shall come; for such an one is not found guiltless" ([Alma 5:27-29](#)).

The Book of Mormon teaches: "No unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore, how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins" ([Alma 11:37](#)). The Doctrine and Covenants states: "And they who are not sanctified through the law which I have given unto you, even the law of Christ, must inherit another kingdom, even that of a terrestrial kingdom, or that of a telestial kingdom. For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory" ([D&C 88:21-22](#)). Those who are unwilling to consistently put forth the effort to observe God's laws may receive a reward for other good things they have done, but they will not inherit eternal life.

Gospel Ordinances

Gospel ordinances are required for salvation. Jesus taught: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" ([John 3:5](#)). Gospel ordinances are only valid when performed by an authorized individual holding the priesthood authority. Today this authority is found in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

All Expected to Come to Christ in His Church

All are expected to come to Christ in His Church, even with varying backgrounds and difficult personal situations. Christ taught:

"And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin. And by this you may know they are under the bondage of sin, because they come not unto me. For whoso cometh not unto me is under the bondage of sin. And whoso receiveth not my voice is not acquainted with my voice, and is not of me. And by this you may know the righteous from the wicked, and that the whole world groaneth under sin and darkness even now" ([D&C 84:39-53](#)).

Continuing Progress

Jesus taught: "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" ([Matthew 4:4](#)). Yet many faiths today claim to accept certain truths while rejecting others. Jews recognize the Old Testament law and prophets as containing God's words, while sectarian Christians claim to accept the Old and New Testament while rejecting the possibility of additional scripture. Latter-day Saints recognize that God loves all his children, not just those who lived in ancient Israel, and accept the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Book of Mormon. Latter-day Saints also accept the continuing words of God through living prophets today.

God's word is given to us according to our heed and diligence ([Alma 12:9-12](#)). Whenever we refuse to accept or live by more of God's word, we draw a line cutting ourselves off from God. To reject additional divine knowledge also demonstrates a lack of understanding and obedience to what we have already received. The Lord teaches: "Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another ... and I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that I speak forth words according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I can speak another, for my work is not yet finished" ([2 Nephi 29:9-10](#)). He proclaims: "He that is built upon the rock receiveth it with gladness; and he that is built upon a sandy foundation trembleth lest he shall fall. Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! ... I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have" ([2 Nephi 28:28-30](#)).

Perfection

Christ commanded his disciples, "be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect" ([Matthew 5:48](#)). Many individuals view this as an impossible task, but such views are founded in a misunderstanding of the word perfection as used in a gospel sense. The Greek word "teleos" translated as "perfection" in the King James bible means whole or complete. It does not imply limitless understanding or flawless mastery, but rather that we become whole in Christ and fill the measure of our creation. To become whole, we must repent of our sins and obey God's laws. In this sense, Antoine de St. Exupery stated: "perfection is achieved not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away." Moroni teaches how this perfection can be achieved: "Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God" ([Moroni 10:32](#)).

Endure to the End

God will evaluate current and past performance in light of future actions. The Book of Mormon prophet King Benjamin teaches that we must live righteously to "always retain a remission of your sins" ([Mosiah 4:11-12](#)). John admonishes, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" ([2 John 1:8](#)), while the Doctrine and Covenants admonishes us to "pray always, lest you enter into temptation and lose your reward" ([D&C 31:12](#)). The Lord states: "unto that soul who sinneth shall the former sins return, saith the Lord your God" ([D&C 82:7](#)). When an individual returns to sin, any prior remission of his sins is lost. This is because the repentance includes forsaking the sin from that time forward, and return to sinning demonstrates that prior repentance was incomplete.

Our current actions affect not only the present, but the future. Every choice we make, whether right or wrong, make us more likely to repeat that same choice in the future, until patterns become habit and habit becomes character. Choice is therefore a transient gift, and the value of the opportunity to choose to do right in each moment is immeasurable and far exceeds our present vision.

There is a cumulative benefit to living God's word. The reward for acting righteously for the hundredth or thousandth time is much greater than the first time. As we obey God's commandments in spite of trials and endure to the end, we demonstrate that the commandments are "written in our hearts" and have become part of our nature in harmony with God's covenant: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" ([Jeremiah 31:33](#)).

God Strengthens the Faithful

The Book of Mormon teaches: "if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God, he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide a means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them" ([1 Nephi 17:3](#)). God promises that his grace will be sufficient for the trials we are called to face. God will not always take away our burdens, but

if we turn to him, he can make them light: "I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs" ([Mosiah 24:14](#)). Christ grants the faithful his peace ([John 14:27](#)) and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Scriptures teach: "he that is faithful in tribulation, the reward of the same is greater in the kingdom of heaven" ([D&C 58:2](#)).

Human Debt to God is Immeasurable

Man is the only one of God's creations that does not always obey His laws. The Book of Mormon teaches: "How great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth. For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God" ([Helaman 12:7-8](#)). Man has nothing to boast of in himself. King Benjamin taught: "And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were created of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you" ([Mosiah 2:25](#)). After seeing a vision of the worlds and the eternities, Moses stated: "man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed" ([Moses 1:10](#)). It is only in and through Christ that man can overcome the burden of sin and receive eternal life, the greatest of all of the gifts of God. God's love for us is so great we represent the central purpose of His work: "For this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" ([Moses 1:39](#)).

We will be in God's debt forever ([Mosiah 2:20-24](#)). When we obey God's commands, they glory belongs to God alone as we are only doing our duty and can merit nothing of ourselves. Jesus taught: "Which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" ([Luke 17:7-10](#)).