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## *Essentials for Salvation*

In things essential unity,  
in nonessentials liberty,  
in all things charity.  
—Richard Baxter

August 2010 by Cal Fullerton

It has been said that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) is not a Christian organization because Mormonism denies one or more of the “essential” doctrines of the gospel. To determine if that statement is correct, we need to have a good grasp of what actually is essential. **To correctly classify the LDS we need to be sure which doctrines of the Holy Bible are absolutely mandatory in order for someone to become a Christian and enter heaven.** Roughly seventy percent of Mormon teachings agree with evangelical teachings. But that does not prove that the LDS is a Christian denomination. The tenets and members have to agree with the Bible’s essentials.

I have assembled these essentials into four.

### **Essential Number 1: Believe God Rewards.**

**Hebrews 11:6**

**And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**

A basic principle found in every book of the Bible is that God rewards obedience and punishes disobedience. The fact that God blesses those who look for him is not only a constant underlying biblical theme, it is essential that we believe it if we are going to come to him.

### **Essential Number 2: Repent to Faith in Jesus.**

**Luke 13:5**

**Unless you repent, you too will all perish.**

**John 3:16, 18**

**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. . . . Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already.**

Unlike Essential Number 1, Essential Number 2 is not just essential, it also brings salvation to your heart.

Let's consider that a bit. Some people make the essentials of repentance and faith into two steps. But for the sake of making things as simple as possible, I prefer to think of them as being one step.

During my first years as a Christian I wondered, **Would someone be saved if they had faith, but didn't repent?** My question was based on a **false premise because later I discovered that it is impossible to do one without the other.** According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, to repent means "to change one's mind and purpose," and it involves "both a turning from sin and a turning to God."<sup>1</sup> Since turning to God is part of *Vine's* definition of repentance, turning to God and repentance are one step. Deciding to turn to God by faith is in itself an act of repentance.

John 14:6 tells us, "No one comes to the Father except through me." Therefore, since Jesus is the only way to get to God, the sin that we absolutely have to repent of is the sin of not believing in Jesus.

It's simple because it's a gift of grace. Whoever believes is already freed from condemnation, already possesses eternal life, and will not perish. Whoever does not believe is already condemned and will perish.

For clearer understanding, I use the following example:

The Continental Divide winds along the tops of the Rocky Mountains of the North American West. If a drop of rain falls one inch west of the Divide, it eventually drifts into the Pacific Ocean; if a drop falls one inch east of the Divide, it ends up in the Gulf of Mexico. Similarly, the great dividing line between those who are Christians and those who are not is belief (faith, trust) in God's Son. That is because Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

There is another definition of repentance that is often used. **Some people think of repentance as the purifying process that faith sets in motion.** This

includes repentance from sins other than that of rejecting Jesus' lordship, such as adultery, jealousy, or prejudice. Even in this case, faith and repentance are inseparable twins. If you repent of a bad habit without faith in Jesus, all you have is self-righteousness. Romans 3:20 says, "No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law."

Trusting in Jesus means making him Lord, following him, doing what he says to do.

**Luke 9:23 (Jesus speaking)**

**If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.**

**Romans 8:14 NCV**

**The true children of God are those who let God's Spirit lead them.**

**James 2:17**

**Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**

Martin Luther (1483-1546) put it this way: "We're justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone."<sup>2</sup>

When we begin this walk of faith—following Jesus, being led by his Spirit—we automatically by his power begin the process of overcoming all kinds of corruption.

**1 John 3:3**

**Everyone who has this hope in him [of the second coming] purifies himself, just as he is pure.**

I remember a night before I became a Christian when I couldn't sleep. I kept pacing the floor, consumed with jealousy caused by images of what my girlfriend might be doing as she bar-hopped with her friends. I knew she wasn't always against flirting with other men. Not being a believer, I couldn't trust God for justice. I never looked to him to set everything straight by punishing the wrongdoer and blessing the right doer. Also, my competitiveness toward other men (and whatever other of my evils were involved) caused me to become jealous easily.

That night, my distress grew to desperation for a solution. Finally, around two or three in the morning, I remembered a green, pocket-sized New Testament that had been given me by the Gideons at a college campus. Being raised in Sunday school, I had already been taught that the Bible had answers for life's problems. My desperation now drove me to

surrender. As soon as that New Testament came to mind, I announced out loud, "That's it! The answer's in the Bible!"

The moment I said it, I felt the Spirit of God come over me. It wasn't the traditional sinner's prayer, but knowing my motives, God knew my words were a confession of faith and an act of repentance. He knew I was turning away from unbelief to a life of faith, so he forgave all my sins and put the eternal life of the Spirit in my heart!

**John 3:36**

**Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.**

Consequently, to classify the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we need to find out if they encourage people to repent and believe in God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Essential Number 3: Receive Jesus (the Holy Spirit) Into Your Heart (Be Born Again).**

Even though I call this "Essential Number 3," it seems as my story implied, that it normally happens as one step with "Essential Number 2."

**John 3:3**

**Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."**

**Romans 8:9**

**If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.**

**2 Corinthians 13:5**

**Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?**

Those who have Christ Jesus in them, know God. So we could also say it this way: It is essential that we know God.

**2 Thessalonians 1:8-9**

**He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction.**

### **Essential Number 4: Believe Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ.**

When Jesus enters our hearts, we receive a seed of truth. We start with a little germinating seed. We don't have to wait until we're totally full of truth or know all truth, to call ourselves Christians.

But the Word of God has specified that we definitely need a revelation that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ.

**1 John 4:15**

**If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.**

**1 John 5:5**

**Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.**

**1 John 5:1**

**Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.**

**1 John 2:22**

**Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.**

The titles "Son of God" and "Christ" have to do with Jesus' divinity, including his conception by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb (Luke 1:35). The word Christ means "Messiah" or "Anointed One." To overcome the world—its spiritual death, captivity to sin, and drift toward hell—we must believe in our hearts that Jesus is the (unique) Son of God.

In the gospel of Matthew Jesus said this revelation would be a rock on which he would build his church (Matt. 16:16-18). Even the unbelievers recognized this faith as pivotal:

**John 9:22**

**The Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue.**

Islam claims to believe Jesus was a prophet, but it blatantly denies he was the Son of God, or that he even claimed to be divine.<sup>3</sup>

At my local library a rack of books are near the front door that are being discarded and sold. One time I bought a book for twenty-five cents so no one else would read it. It was by a well-known clairvoyant (someone who claims to have extrasensory perception). Before I threw it into our fireplace, I read one chapter. Someone might have presumed the book was pro-Christ because it was about Christ and a drawing of Christ was on the cover. But the author gave himself away when he conspicuously

and repeatedly avoided saying "Jesus is the Son of God." Instead, he would say, "Jesus is called the Son of God."

According to the Bible, if the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches the four essentials I've listed above, we must classify it as a **Christian denomination instead of an unchristian cult**. That is because God has plainly promised that if you do the essential requirements I have outlined, he will accept you into his eternal family.

Back when I thought the Mormon Church wasn't Christian, I didn't pay much attention to whether each of their doctrines had to do with a mandatory requirement for entering heaven. That was one of the reasons I made a tragic mistake of judgment.

### **Do Essentials Grow?**

Someone might say, "Sure, the essentials here are enough to get started, but as time passes and we learn more of God's ways, his requirements increase." This is true!

However, how are you going to apply that when deciding whether a particular sect is Christian? One group may grow by learning to count to the number 100, but get stuck at B in the alphabet. Another may learn the alphabet up to Q, but get stuck at the number 8. If we set a rule that Christians must have faith enough to count to 53 by the time they've been saved five years or else be kicked out of God's kingdom, we add to the Word of God. We falsely judge our own spiritual kin. And, by setting such man-designed boundaries, we contribute to disunity and diminish the presence of God in our lives. It does not please or glorify God our Father.

I'm an evangelical Christian and that is what I once did. **What a sweet freedom it is to be released from the bondage of falsely condemning my Mormon brothers and sisters in the Lord!**

**Before you judge the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints I encourage you to view the evidence that they adhere to the essential biblical doctrines discussed above. To find that evidence, please click on [Fast Facts](#).**

- 1 W. E. Vine et al. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985) 525.
- 2 The NIV Study Bible, gen. ed. Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 1882.
- 3 Sulaiman Shahid Mufassir, Jesus, A Prophet of Islam (Indianapolis: Amer. Trust, 1980), 5-7.

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