

How Are We Saved?



From [EWTN](#)

Christopher V. Mirus provides this answer in response to a CRNET member's question.

How are we saved? The best way to know is to look at the teaching of the Church, which Christ instituted to safeguard the doctrine that He gave to the apostles, and which was completed through the revelation of the Holy Spirit to the apostles after Jesus's ascension. We cannot pick and choose what we believe about faith and salvation. The Church clearly teaches that we are justified by the free gift of God's grace. If we do not resist this first grace when it is given, we are immediately justified. Along with this grace we are given the three theological virtues. Faith in the Pauline sense encompasses all three of these virtues. Faith in the more specific sense is the first theological virtue. This means belief in what God has revealed. Thus the first theme of Christ's teaching when he began his public life (Mark 1:15) was, "Repent and believe the good news." The Greek word for repent is "metanoeo." It carries the root meaning "to change one's mind." This can only refer to the acceptance (i.e. non-rejection) of the saving grace offered by God, whereby the mind is turned away from sin, to God. Notice that it comes before belief, or faith. So first we turn to God by accepting grace, and immediately after that we believe the "good news of the kingdom of God." This good news encompasses all the teachings of Christ. By the close connection of repentance and belief which Jesus makes, we see that to refuse to believe these teachings is to reject grace.

However, it is also easy to see that a mere intellectual belief in the teachings of Jesus does not sufficiently express the meaning of His words in Mark 1:15.

When Jesus tells us to "believe the good news of the kingdom of God," something more is implied. To believe the good news means to believe that salvation has indeed arrived for men--that through Jesus we are rescued from sin and death and made adopted children of God. Christ promised His followers that they would not die forever, but that He would raise them up on the last day. Belief that He spoke truly, i.e., trust in His promises, is also called Hope. This, then, is the second of the theological virtues, the second aspect of the belief in the good news.

But there is still something missing. The good news of the kingdom, as preached by Jesus, also includes the moral law, summed up in the law of charity. If we truly believe the good news, we must have charity, or love: the third theological virtue. Thus Jesus says in Mt 22:37ff: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two [commandments] the whole law and the prophets depend." Later, He explains again what this love means (Jn 14:21): "He who keeps my commandments, and observes them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father" In other words, belief (faith in the narrow sense) is not enough. Hope is not enough. In order to receive the Father's favor, we must love, and this includes keeping the commandments. As James says (Ja 2:26), "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

In sum: How are we saved? Not by faith alone, but by grace alone, as I believe Fr. Most has said. This grace it is that makes us participate in the very nature of God himself, so that we become his adopted children. In other words, this adoption, and it alone, is what justifies. But to avoid being disinherited, as it were, we must act as sons, and so God give to all those in the state of grace the capacities for supernatural acts of faith (again in the restricted sense), hope, and charity. Unless we practice these virtues, we shall lose that sanctifying grace, that divine adoption; we shall no longer be justified. If I refuse to believe what my Father has told me about himself and his plan for me, I certainly cannot participate in that plan. Thus without the gift of Faith, i.e. belief (insofar as I am informed and capable of believing), I cannot be adopted. If I later reject the faith, I shall be disinherited. Also, if I refuse to trust in the promises that my Father has made to me, then too I show myself to be truly unworthy of them. Thus if I refuse or reject the gift of Hope, I cannot be a son of God. Finally, if I do not act in a way proper to a child of God, if I do not will in conformity to and in response to the divine will of my Father, I cannot retain my adoption. That is, if I reject the gift of Charity, which as we have seen involves the keeping of the moral law, I cannot be saved.

If you look carefully at the above, you will find that the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity, correspond perfectly to the three aspects of Pauline faith. And this is not at all surprising, because St. Paul, as has the Catholic Church for 19 centuries after him, read the Gospels as an elucidation of that first teaching of Christ. For Paul, faith is our response to the original mandate to believe the good news of the kingdom of God, which, as we have seen, includes all three aspects which Paul explains in his epistles.

Grace comes first. Faith necessarily accompanies it. Faith shows itself under the three aspects of theological faith, hope, and charity. This is the pure teaching of Jesus Christ, the good news of the kingdom of God. This is the teaching of St. Paul, that first and greatest commentator on the Gospels. This is the sublime teaching of the Catholic Church. It is not cold and ritualistic, rather, it is the magnificent truth of God's great love for us. If you do not hear it proclaimed from the pulpit in Catholic churches, pray for the priest. He needs it. But you will never find the fulness of truth in any other "church." They may bring emotional satisfaction, but faith is something deeper than that. It is the response of the whole person to Jesus Christ in faith, hope, and charity.

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