

You may have heard many messages about hearers versus doers. This topic is found in James chapter 1, Romans chapter 2, and elsewhere. The doers are justified, right? Yet, 1 Corinthians chapter 13 clues us in that our motivation is key to the doing. You could know everything. You could do all sorts of great things. But if you lack charity - compassion, love - it is a waste of time for you personally. Of course those who might have been helped have benefited. Matthew 7:21-23 tells us that there will be doers who are cast out. So going through the motions grudgingly, or through fear, is of little value. True religion is not fear religion, but rather love religion - and not coerced, but rather voluntary love religion.

God is not looking simply for those who are reluctantly willing to be doers. Instead, God looks for those who are enthusiastically willing, or in other words, zealous. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that God rewards those who diligently seek Him, not those who just kind of seek Him. We must be sincere voluntary doers, doing good, not to be saved, but because we want to do good. Salvation is not through works, but is rather related to the condition of a heart that gladly does good for others.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. -Romans 12:9-13 (NIV)

Salvation and spiritual health is not some simple formula of acquiring the knowledge of do's and don'ts, and then just going through the right motions. One is not saved by group association, or by a scorecard of doctrinal knowledge. Instead, one is saved by the condition of one's heart. What is your orientation? Is it similar to God? Do you aspire to God's character traits? Do you desire to be in harmony with God? Do you love what God loves and hate what God hates?

Some say love is a feeling. Others say love is an action. Perhaps it is the combination of both, because love should be what motivates one to action. If you have love, you will be a doer of the right kind. You will be doing good out of the motivation of your heart, and for no selfish reason. Even so, it is true that "service is its own reward." Doing good with right motivation brings satisfaction to the doer.

God can tell a lot about us by our behavior, by the fruits of our conduct, and how we spend our time. But God also gets to know us through prayer. Recall that those who are cast out in the parables and other teachings of Christ are told to depart, along with this phrase, "I never knew you." This doesn't mean God didn't know who they were or didn't know their name. It means He really never knew them on a personal basis. He did of course know that they were lacking motivation to develop a personal relationship with Him. Otherwise, God would know them - both the Father to whom one prays, and the Son, who hears all our prayers as High Priest (and whom we may also directly address in our prayers). Eternity is about relationships, so having a relationship with the Father and Jesus is a very important thing to have now.

We are told to cast all our cares upon Him (1 Peter 5:7). That is how we confirm what is in our heart. Sure, God knows what we need before we ask, but God would like to know what is on our minds and hearts. God would like to hear our take on our situation and our take on the needs of others. And we should certainly be praying for the needs of others. Of course our bright ideas and what we really need may be very different things. So it is always best to ask for God's wise and loving will to be done regardless. Truly Father knows best.

Some say there is no commandment to pray. But there really is. It is the first commandment. If God is first with you, and you love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, you will pray. Christ gave us an example. He prayed to His Father, and explained how we should pray. The general outline for prayer is found in Matthew 6:5-15. And James 5:16 tells us, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Prayer is a lifeline to the greatest loving power in the universe - the God of all.

If you do not have a daily open-hearted relationship with God in prayer, you are lacking a crucial prerequisite for the road to salvation. The Christian life begins with repentance and baptism. But that is only the beginning. The Greek word for conversion (epistrepho) means to turn about or turn again and is essentially synonymous with repentance. So to be converted is to be in a continual state of repentance as one makes adjustments to stay on the narrow path, and seeks to make real progress. Humans need God's help to live as Christians, so a relationship with God is essential.

We must continually identify and cast off our shortcomings, while striving for better character traits. And this is not simply a self-examination process. It also requires our participation in life. One cannot be a Christian in a vacuum. As stated above, one cannot be a Christian without God's help. There is no need for you to try to conquer sin with only your own effort, or to feel like you are on a guilt trip. Under the New Covenant, you can be forgiven every day. God is always there to hear your prayers, and help - the most important partnership one can have. If one has love – if one's heart is healthy - they will exercise it by serving and caring for others, which is God's will. Your heart, not your head, is key to your salvation - reaching out to God; doing God's will; reaching out to help those in need.

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