

THE ESSENCE OF SALVATION

You were born bad, prone to sin.

Not to insult you or make you mad, but you came preprogrammed to be selfish, to not want to share (covet), to lie, to blame your sibling for something you did, to get mad when you didn't get your way or something you wanted. You know this to be true. God called it "sin."

Romans 3:23 confirms this reality about you (and about me): *"For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* And just to pile on, Romans 3:10-12, *"None is righteous, no, not one;"*, Psalm 14:1-3, *"no one understands; no one seeks for God."* Psalm 53:1-3, *"All have turned aside: together they have become worthless; no one does good."* King David went so far as to say, *"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."* Psalm 51:3 (KJV).

Jesus' half-brother, James, later upped the ante when he wrote, *"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."* (James 2:10).

And Paul drove the stake even deeper in the ground in Romans 1:20 when he wrote, *"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."*

"WITHOUT EXCUSE!"

So, we must be asking, as did the disciples, "Who then can be saved?" (Matt. 16:25-26)

In 1992-94, I was serving as a bi-vocational Minister of Music and Youth in a small Baptist Church. One Sunday afternoon, the "leader of the youth group" came asking questions like, "Mr. Ralph, if you smoke, will you go to Hell?" "If you drink, will you go to Hell?" And in my spirit, I sensed she was really asking, "How bad can I be and still make it to Heaven?"

That sparked a journey that started the following Sunday afternoon when I announced we would be considering "The Essence of Salvation." (You can only imagine the eye rolls.)

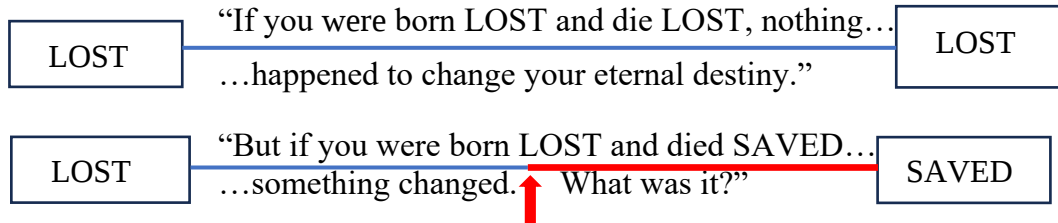
Then I asked them how many of them had perfume or cologne at home. All hands went up, so I knew I had them back - LOL! I asked these primarily middle-schoolers how much they had paid for their treasures. I got prices ranging from \$20 to \$40 (remember this was 1993).

Then I asked them, "What would you say if I told you that out of that whole bottle of smell-good, only 2-4% was actually fragrance, that the rest was only alcohol and water?" NOW they were engaged! "NO, Mr. Ralph! That can't be true!" But I assured them of the veracity of my claim that with that 2-4%, what was in the bottle was perfume worth \$40 and without

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it, the bottle was worthless. The 2-4% that was fragrance was the “essence” of the entire bottle.

Then to the blackboard, I drew the following diagrams with comments:



I got all the standard Sunday School answers: “It’s when I asked Jesus to come into my heart,” What does that mean? “It’s when I prayed ‘The Sinner’s Prayer.’” Was that enough??

But in John 3:3 and again in 3:7, Nicodemus, a high-ranking religious leader who essentially asked Jesus, “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” Jesus replied “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be **Born Again**, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.*” So, whatever being “born again” means, THAT is the ESSENCE OF SALVATION. This is what, if we have it, Jesus assures us that we will “see the Kingdom of God,” and without it we will not “see” God’s Kingdom.

I thought I had done a pretty good job with my teaching! Proudful Ralph! UGH!!

Then God asked me, “So, Ralph, what does being “born again” mean? – to you?”
OUCH! Didn’t see that one coming!

So, I went back to John 3:16, “*For God (the Father) so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son (Jesus), that whosoever believeth in Him (Jesus) should not perish, but have everlasting life.*” I had read that all my life, but for the first time the word “believe” jumped out at me. Just what did that word mean in its original context.

I went to a pastor friend I highly regarded for the answer, and he enlightened me that the Greek word was ‘*pisteuo*,’ which meant “to trust AND obey.” So much for just believing Jesus existed or that Jesus was God’s Son! Even the demons believe that! (James 2:19) I was required to put my total trust in Jesus ALONE for my salvation and obey Him completely!

The next Sunday, the preacher quoted Romans 10:13, “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the LORD, shall be saved.*” Then the word “call” jumped out at me! What did “call” mean? It certainly seemed to be more than a simple, unemotional prayer. Then God reminded me of Peter walking on the water. When he took his eyes off Jesus, he began to sink and, in fear of drowning, “called,” (I believe) **SCREAMED**: “LORD!! SAVE ME!!”

“*Neither is there salvation in any other (than Jesus): for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*” Acts 4:12. Satan wants you to believe you are a “good person,” but **how “good” is “good enough?”**