



Five Principles of Salvation in Christ

by [Tom Miller](#)



Tibetan Folk Dancers in front of Namgyal Monastery in Ithaca, NY

This post is based on a talk I was invited to give at an interfaith conference held during the dedication of the new 14th Dalai Lama Library and Learning Center in Ithaca. Speakers were asked to present key values and practices of their faith related to Buddhist ideals of compassion, loving-kindness and forgiveness. The challenge was to make this presentation in fifteen minutes or less, including the time allotted for translation into Tibetan. Fortunately, the senior lama waved off the translator and said it was fine to give the talk entirely in English. So, I actually had fifteen minutes to speak. The text that follows is a slightly expanded version of my original talk.

Today I will be sharing on **Five Principles of Christian Salvation** out of which spring the love, compassion and forgiveness we have been asked to discuss today.

First, a short word about myself. In the 1990s, I served as co-chairman of the *US-Tibetan Resettlement Project*. In that capacity I was asked to travel to Dharamsala, India, to report on the project and invite the Dalai Lama to establish a branch of his personal monastery, Namgyal Monastery, in America to provide cultural support for Tibetan refugees. Another goal was to help Westerners better understand Buddhism. Today we witness a beautiful flowering of that invitation.

At that time I was already a Christian moved by compassion for the suffering of the Tibetan people. I had become a follower of Jesus after experiencing a vision of Him during an interfaith conference in New York City in 1984. [That story is described in detail in my book [Upward Falling](#).] In the vision, Jesus was standing with His arms stretched wide in open invitation and we exchanged words spirit to spirit. The last thing He said was: "Turn to me." Those words have directed my life ever since.

Soon after that experience, I had the opportunity to ask the Dalai Lama what Buddhism teaches about "Salvation." He said very simply that Buddhism doesn't teach about salvation. It seems fitting now to share what I've learned from experience about this central tenet of Christian faith.

The five principles of salvation in Christ that I am discussing are:

- 1. Salvation in Christ is the ultimate spiritual foundation of human freedom.**
- 2. Christian salvation is the result of being born again of the Holy Spirit of God.**



3. Our salvation depends on having an active relationship with God in Christ.
4. Salvation always involves making a sacrifice to extend God's love.
5. Divine salvation produces good "Fruit of the Spirit."

I. Salvation in Christ is the ultimate spiritual foundation of human freedom.

Salvation is the very essence of Jesus' name in Hebrew, which is *Yeshua*. The word literally means: "God is Salvation" or simply "God Saves." A deeper root of the word is *Yasha*, which means "to deliver"—like rescuing someone by leading them into in a wide open space. This can be pictured as walking through a narrow pass into a beautiful mountain meadow such as one sees in Tibet.

Jesus said whoever He sets free is free indeed. By this He meant there is an ultimate form of inner freedom available through Him that delivers people from oppression, attachment to negative imaginings, past mistakes, illness, sin, even the power of death. The Biblical word sin literally means to "miss the mark." The mark, or goal, is staying connected in real time with God through Christ.

The Bible says "taste and see that the Lord is good." When we our open our hearts to the goodness of God and sincerely desire to change how we live, the door opens to a brand new way of living. However, people often need to let go of preconceived ideas and opinions about God in order to experience the reality of God. It requires an intentional decision on our part.

2. Christian salvation is the result of being born again of the Holy Spirit of God.

Jesus is known as the "Living Word of God" and Holy Spirit is called the "Breath of Life." These terms and many scriptures indicate that our spiritual life as followers of Jesus is birthed when we receive the Living Word of God implanted by the Holy Spirit into the core of our being.

Jesus put it this way:

"I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God... Flesh is born of flesh, but spirit is born of the Spirit. Do not be amazed that I said, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes. You hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." *John 3:3, 6-8*

When we are born again, a process of inner transformation begins that does not end in our lifetime. Christians call this process "sanctification," which refers to restoring our innocence, becoming morally right with God, and being made both humanly and spiritually whole in Christ Jesus. Jesus summarized this transformative principle very simply by saying: "**Look, I make all things new.**" This includes all people who choose to follow Him who are born again.

3. Our salvation depends on having an active relationship with God in Christ.

Jesus taught His followers to call God "Father" to indicate it is possible to enter into a personal relationship with the Source of our Being when we follow Jesus. This means salvation is not simply a question of theology or church doctrine, but of pursuing and remaining connected with God through Christ.

Jesus actualized this abstract thought by saying "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." Another name given for Jesus is *Logos*, which means the "Word" or the "creative expression" of God. Still another way to put it is to say Jesus is the "language" God uses when giving people the ability to live connected to God in real time.



Following Jesus is all about having a personal relationship with the Source and Essence of Life as we know it. This seemingly incredulous proposition has been attested as real and relevant to everyday life by literally billions (no exaggeration) of faithful Christ followers throughout two millennia of human history.

In this context, Christianity has a long and rich tradition of spiritual practices dating back nearly 2000 years that help deepen our connection with the Father. These include worship, prayer, acts of service, mindfulness practices, and meditation on the word of God. All of these have deep roots mentioned throughout the Bible. [*One of the purposes of the Interfaith Conference was to compare spiritual practices utilized in different faith traditions and belief systems.*]

4. Salvation always involves making a sacrifice to extend God's love.

Jesus modeled the perfect sacrifice by allowing Himself to be killed on a Cross like a sacrificial Lamb.

There is both Biblical and non-Biblical evidence for this as historical fact.

After 3 days He rose again to reveal His victory over darkness. He was laid in a tomb, but the power of life in Him was greater than the power of death. This is why Christians say we are saved by the sacrificial blood of the Lamb of God—not simply because Jesus died on the Cross, but because He came back to life from the dead.

One of the most noble forms of personal sacrifice is forgiving other people. When we forgive someone we give up our attachment to anger, hatred, pain, rejection and bitter feelings in order to extend God's love. Jesus modeled this on the Cross when He asked the Father to forgive those who were killing Him.

It's important to note that forgiving someone doesn't mean that suffering inflicted on us was ever right. We're not asked to accept that any form of abuse we've experienced was fair or appropriate. But we are asked to allow God's justice to displace our negative emotions and desire for revenge. In other words, forgiving others unburdens our own heart. This is why Jesus said His followers need to forgive even those who persecute them.

The more we are willing to give up our old ways of thinking, feeling and doing things, the more the process of inner transformation overflows outwardly and affects the world around us.

5. Divine salvation produces positive "Fruit of the Spirit."

Holy Spirit is a direct expression of the Living God working in us and through us for the benefit of others. In other words, God's Spirit is not simply energy or some kind of life force. Among other things, Holy Spirit produces positive attributes in our character that arise naturally like fruit growing on a vine.

Nine specific fruit of the Spirit are named in the Bible: *Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Goodness, Kindness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control.*

These qualities are not given for our personal benefit only. They need to be shared in order to continue creating divine abundance throughout the earth, like using a candle to light other candles. This is where compassion, loving-kindness and forgiveness most begin to manifest in the life of a follower of Jesus.

Jesus said it is essential to have a personal relationship with Him for these positive attitudes to be formed: "Just as no branch can bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me." John 15:4

In other words, these attributes are the natural result of surrendering humbly to the grace and goodness of God's Spirit rather than striving to muster personal will power. Christians are all called to enter into the very midst of the world's suffering by becoming ever more like Jesus to overcome that suffering. This is part of our divine role in the human condition. A sacrificial lifestyle for the sake of releasing Holy Spirit Fruit around us is at the very heart of being a follower of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.



Closing

In closing, I'm not proposing that these five principles comprise a systematic theology of Christian salvation. They simply and concisely reflect what I have personally experienced and seen many other people experience. (Remember, I was only given fifteen minutes to speak.)

It's important to avoid the temptation to look at these principles as a chronological series of steps through which we must pass in order to enter into the fullness of Christian salvation. Rather, they are part of a very organic process of living in a dynamic relationship with Christ that affects how we relate to the world. Like all organic life, the Fruit of the Spirit manifest differently in different seasons and situations in our lives, including the different needs of people we encounter.

Often a follower of Jesus discovers new areas of their inner life that are not yet free, and so returns to the first principle of turning their attention back to Jesus to be set free, as if starting all over again. This is one way of describing the ongoing process of "repentance" in our lives. ("Repent" in Biblical Hebrew is *teshuva*, which means *turn back*, or simply *return*.) When we turn our attention back again and again to *Yeshua*, Jesus, God's grace flows, and salvation as described in these five principles arises naturally—not as a reward for repenting but as expressions of our ongoing process of spiritual growth.

God loves to reveal layers of our lives that are not yet free in order to bring us into ever greater depths of intimate spiritual relationship with Christ Jesus. Our past and present failures, sins and shortcomings do not prevent Him from accepting us when we turn to Him humbly and sincerely.

Jesus can change you in the blink of an eye—even right now—just as He did me the first time I saw Him in a vision! The good news is you don't need to have a vision to see Him. You can just turn to him in your heart anytime, even right now.