

Must You Believe Something to Be Saved?

I. A Few Remarks on Theology and Culture

A. Culture informs theology: God's world interprets God's Word

1. Geocentricity (Psalm 93:1—"the earth shall not be moved")
2. Divine passibility
3. Slavery (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22—"Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything")
4. Environmental stewardship (Gen. 1:28—"have dominion")

B. Theology informs culture: God's Word interprets God's world

1. C. S. Lewis: "always remember the resistant material"
2. Against the left: homosexual practice is sin.
3. Against the right: patriotism in church can be idolatrous.

C. Culture and theology have continuity and change

D. Our cultural change: from modernity to postmodernity

1. What remains the same: autonomy
2. What has changed

Modernity

Individual

Optimistic

Truth is Objective, Universal, Absolute

Proof, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*,
Four Spiritual Laws

Postmodernity

Group, Community

Pessimistic

Truth is Subjective, Perspectival, Relative

Stories, Embodied Evangelism

II. *Must You Believe Something to Be Saved?*

A. Liberals: we do not need to believe in Jesus as long as we follow his example of love.

1. Modern liberals: denied the supernatural and that Jesus is God, so his example of love was all that was left.

2. Postmodern liberals: the shrinking global village makes it difficult to accept that our friends in other religions are going to hell because they do not believe as we do.

a. Samir Selmanovic, “The Sweet Problem of Inclusiveness,” in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, eds. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 190-92. Cf. p. 43-45, 56, and 100-02.

b. Brian McLaren, *The Last Word and the Word After That* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 121, 136, 138.

c. Spencer Burke and Barry Taylor, *A Heretic’s Guide to Eternity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 61, 126-27, 131-32, 206.

B. Conservatives: we cannot follow Jesus without first believing in him.

1. John 3: Jesus counsels Nicodemus (3:18, 36; 6:28-29)

2. Sin $\xrightarrow{\text{requires}}$ Regeneration $\xrightarrow{\text{needs}}$ Holy Spirit $\xrightarrow{\text{uses}}$ Truth

3. Martin Luther: “Outwardly (God) deals with us through the oral Word, or the Gospel and through visible signs, as Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Inwardly He deals with us through the Holy Spirit and faith...but always in such a way and in this order that the outward means must precede the inward means, which come afterwards through the outward means. So, then, God has willed that He will not give to anyone the inward gifts (of the Spirit and faith) except through the outward means” (*D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Weimar, 1883--], 38:136).

4. Romans 10:13-15; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 3:23—“And this is his command: to **believe** in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to **love** one another as he commanded us.”