

Entrance Exam

There are a lot of places you can't get into without the proper credentials – military installations, for example. You can't get into medical school without passing the prerequisite classes. You can't call yourself a lawyer unless you pass the bar. You can't even get into Costco without a membership card! But did you notice there's no entrance exam for church? You don't have to prove you are smart enough or virtuous enough or have enough money before you're allowed to come to Jesus. This follows the Savior's own example. Contrary to the practices of religious leaders of his day, Jesus associated with and ministered to all, even those who were social outcasts, like tax collectors.

Jesus... saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him... When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." (Matthew 9:9-12)

Years ago, a new friend declined my invitation to come to church with me. Her reason? She said she thought most Christians were hypocrites, saying one thing but doing another. I wasn't sure how to respond, but this is what came out: "Yeah, that's the trouble with churches; they're full of sinners." True statement, because we're all "sinners." We're all sick people in need of Jesus' healing and salvation, including those self-righteous Pharisees and everybody sitting in a pew on Sunday mornings (Romans 3:23). I don't know what bad experiences my friend had with so-called Christians (remember, there's no exam; anybody can call himself a Christian). But even the most sincere, best-intentioned believer will mess up sometimes. Jesus is the only perfect one. Trust in him, not his flawed followers.

One more thing. Although no one has to show worthiness to come to Jesus – he loves and welcomes all – there is an entrance requirement for heaven. No, not proof of enough good works done, the right prayers said, or even regular church attendance. None of that counts towards your admission because Jesus already paid the full price on the cross. The way to heaven is wide open but only through him (John 13:6), because only the blood of Jesus can make us fit to enter by washing our sins away (1 John 1:7). When you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, your name is added to heaven's guest list. Accept the invitation to follow him today.

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