

4. How Do I Become a Christian?

I'm New at This

I was not raised in a Christian home and so was a complete atheist until I believed the Gospel and received forgiveness for my sins. This turnaround in my life happened in my early twenties while traveling from England and spending time in the USA. I met true believers in Jesus Christ, who explained the way of salvation in a way I could understand. I saw a difference in these believers, which I had been looking for over my teen years. I could see they had a genuine love and devotion for God and one another. It was the first time I encountered the presence of God. Before I gave my life to Christ if someone had asked me the question, "what is a Christian?" I would have replied that a true Christian is someone who keeps the Ten Commandments. I didn't understand what it means to be a Christian and was missing an essential part of the Gospel story. But becoming a Christian is not about our behavior; it is dependent on what God has done for us. I know this may sound confusing to some, but what we could not do for ourselves by being good enough, God has done for us. I hope that by the time you've read this short study, the story of the Gospel (which means good news) will be crystal clear to you.

This study is also for those raised in a Christian home but still not sure of their salvation. Some profess Christianity and may go to church regularly but have no assurance that they are a child of God and destined for heaven. I desire to help you understand what it means to be a Christian and thoroughly enjoy a relationship with God. Hopefully, you have read the studies, [Who is Jesus?](#) And [Why Did Jesus Die?](#) If not, they are good studies that you should read after this.

Becoming a Christian is not making a new start in life; it is receiving a new life with which to start. God has provided the gift of salvation for us to know that we have eternal life in Jesus Christ. Jesus came two thousand years ago to offer this gift to all who will receive Him. We cannot know God apart from accepting His forgiveness and receiving new life from Jesus. You cannot become a Christian by attaining a standard of behavior; it doesn't work like that. Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (John 3:3). A new-life principle is imparted to us when we repent (repentance means a change of mind and direction) and receive the Lord Jesus as our Savior. Paul the Apostle wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Towards the end of this study, when you fully understand what you are doing, there is a simple prayer you can pray to receive the gift of God. Some things are essential for you to know before you pray, the first being that God loves each of us greatly:

God Loves You and Has a Gift for You.

God has a gift for everyone on planet Earth—if we will receive it. A gift is not earned but originates in the giver's heart and not based on our merit, what each of us has done or not done. It is a grace gift. Grace is a word that means "undeserved favor." We don't deserve the gift of God, but the Lord loves us and wants to bestow His mercy and grace on us.

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)

⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

The Problem of Sin.

We have a problem, though. The problem that is so important for us to understand is the problem of sin. God is perfectly holy, but we are not. We have all done things against our inner moral compass, our conscience, but also against the moral law of God. Our sinful nature creates a divide between God and us, for He is holy: **“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil” (Habakkuk 1:13)**. If we want to live in a perfect place with the Lord, the sinful things that keep us from fellowship with God need to be taken out of the way. If we don’t understand the problem, we will not value the remedy that God has supplied:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear (Isaiah 59:2).

What is Sin?

Our English word "sin" comes to us from a Greek word that means “to fall short of something.” When the New Testament was written, the Greek word described an archer firing an arrow at a target but continually failing to reach the target. God’s requirement for heaven is perfection:

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48)

Each of us has a problem, for we fall short of perfection due to our personal sin and the sinful nature we inherited from our forefather Adam. Our sinful nature separates us from the Creator of all things. Our dilemma is that we cannot be good enough to get ourselves out of our immoral condition. Some people falsely believe they have to clean up their lives before turning to the Lord to be forgiven of sin. They think that God will not accept them because of their sin. But God loves you just the way you are; you can never be good enough. The repentant thief crucified alongside Jesus did not have time to do any good works but humbly asked Christ to forgive him. Jesus replied, **“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43)**. There will be no boasting of what we did to earn a place in heaven (Ephesians 2:9).

You Cannot Save Yourself.

No matter how hard we try to work at being good, our inherent character is flawed—we are sinners by choice, and our human nature is to commit sinful acts. Yes, we can do good works, but even our good works are not acceptable to God: **“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isaiah 64:6)**. If our righteous deeds are polluted, can you imagine what our sinful acts are like to a Holy God? Even when we try to live a clean life, our spirit is defiled before God, and we cannot change ourselves no matter how hard we try:

Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil (Jeremiah 13:23).

The Law Condemns Each of Us as Guilty

³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-38).

May I ask you, how are you doing at keeping the above command, just one of the Ten Commandments? Can you honestly say that you have observed that law all your life? God gave the Ten Commandments to reveal the condition that has poisoned us within. Some people try to live a moral life by attempting to obey God's commandments, but the Scriptures indicate that the law was given to show us how far short we fall of God's perfection and show us our need of a Savior, someone outside of ourselves who can pay our penalty for sin. The only answer for sin is for us to come to Christ for forgiveness:

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law (Galatians 3:24-25).

Have You Ever Personally Sinned?

For whosoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it (James 2:10).

Have you ever personally done anything wrong? We cannot sweep it under the carpet or hide it from God, who knows everything; instead, we must confess or own up to our sin. If we have committed just one sin, it will keep us from God's perfect heaven. Let me put it a different way, "How many murders does it take to be a murderer? The answer is one. How many lies does it take to be a liar? Again, the answer is one. Well, how many sins does it take for a person to be a sinner? Of course, the answer is one.

Sins Penalty

Don't get turned off at this point; there is good news ahead. To appreciate all that God has done for us, we must understand that sin deals out a penalty. The penalty of sin is death, a separation from the author of life—God. This penalty is not just physical death; Adam did not fall dead as soon as he ate the fruit in the Garden of Eden. Sin's penalty is separation from God at the end of our lives:

For everyone belongs to me, the parent, as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die (Ezekiel 18:4)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

What is meant by a wage for our sin? A wage is something you get at the end of your workweek. It is what we deserve for working hard all week. In the same way, our sin pays out a just wage for pleasing our sinful nature; that of separation from God for eternity. A place called Hell. Thank God that there is a significant "but" in the middle of that last verse above. The gift of God is eternal life. But unless we come to Christ and receive His finished work on the cross in place of us, we will perish at the judgment seat where we will all appear:

...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).
...it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

Christ Is the Answer to Sin.

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). This statement **begs the question** that if Christ came to give us life, what did we have before He came? True life, the life of God, is only imparted to us at the point of repentance of sin and turning toward the Lord Jesus Christ for His gift of life. Before that point, we are lost sheep gone astray

and dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1 and 5). The only way out of our deadness and sin was for someone to be our substitute and take the penalty for our rebellion and sin upon Himself:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29).

That is what Jesus did. God laid upon Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God, the sin of us all. Because He was and is God in the flesh, only His life could have the value needed to satisfy eternal justice to bring us “home.” Only God could pay the price for us all. It was His life for our life, a unique exchange, and one that is significant to our advantage far more than we can ever comprehend.

Let’s put it another way. For example, if we were to think about ants, how many ants would amount to a sheep's same value—a million, maybe ten million? What about the whole population of ants, would that equal one sheep? A sheep is a higher life form and higher value than all ants put together. Well, let's go further with that thought. How many sheep would be the equivalent value of a human being? In God's view, all sheep worldwide do not equal the life of one human made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Let's go one step further; what kind of price needed to be paid to buy all human beings out of the slave market of Satan? Only the Sovereign Lord Himself could equal the value of all who would receive His death as a substitute for theirs.

We are talking about the redemption payment of the Son of God laying down His life in exchange for our mortal, imperfect life. That’s why the death of Christ paid for all your sin. No man can take away sin, but the Lord of Glory can, and He did. God laid upon His Son the sin of all us sheep that have gone astray. If we receive Christ by faith, we are regenerated or born-again from above by the payment price of the precious blood of Christ. We now belong to the Good Shepherd, who has given His life for the sheep. Jesus said that He came to lay down His life for His sheep (John 10:15):

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6).

...by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene...there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved (Acts 4:10,12).

...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

Christ Paid the Penalty for Sin

Have you ever wondered why Christ needed to die such a brutal and violent death? Indeed, God could have planned an easier death for His Son. The answer, I believe, is this: only a violent death could have exposed sin in the way it so sorely needed revealing. One preacher said, “Could Jesus have exposed sin in all of its foul horrors if He had died in His bed, or by accident, or by disease?” It is one of the tragedies of human life that we fail to recognize the sinfulness of sin. God’s plan was for Christ to die as a substitute for all who would put their faith in Christ's death as their death, thereby showing the sinfulness of sin and the just punishment placed upon it. Out of God's love for man, He came in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus, to take man's place and bestow mercy and grace upon us. Another example of this kind of substitutionary legality is found in history:

During a war between Britain and France, men were conscripted into the French Army by a kind of lottery system. When someone's name was drawn, he had to go off to battle. On one occasion, the authorities came to a certain man and told him he was among those chosen. He refused to go, saying, "I was shot and killed two years ago." At first, the officials questioned his sanity, but he insisted that was indeed the case. He claimed that the military records would show that he was killed in action. "How can that be?" they questioned. "You are alive now!" He explained that when his name first came up, a close friend said, "you have a large family, but I am not married, and nobody depends on me. I'll take your name and address and go in your place." And that is indeed what the record showed. This rather unusual case was referred to Napoleon Bonaparte, who decided that the country had no legal claim on that man. He was free. He had died in the person of another.¹

In the viewpoint of God, when Christ died, He died as a substitute to release you from the legal claims that our adversary, Satan, has against you because of your sin. Christ died for you and as you. God sees Christ taking your place just as the one who went to war in another's place. When Christ died, God saw you as having died too:

Since **you died with Christ** to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules? (Colossians 2:20).

¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³**For you died**, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).

Through His death, burial and resurrection, Jesus came to give us His life. We received physical life from our forefather, Adam, but Christ came to provide us with the life of God, and this life is imparted to us when we wholeheartedly put our faith and trust in Him. When we believe, our sins and guilt are washed away, and the life of God flows into each of us connected to Christ by faith.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that **whoever believes may in Him have eternal life**. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes** in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that **the world should be saved** through Him. **He who believes in Him is not judged**; he who does not believe has been judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:14-18 Emphasis mine).

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

We Receive this Gift of Salvation by Receiving the Person of Christ.

¹ 1500 illustrations for Biblical Preaching, Edited by Michael P. Green, Printed by Baker Book House, Page 360.

¹²Yet to all ***who received him***, to those who believed in his name, ***he gave the right to become children of God***— ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but ***born of God***. ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, ***full of grace and truth*** (John 1:12-14).

God gives people the gift and impartation of eternal life when they believe. He has made the receiving of eternal life so simple that even a child can receive Christ. This gift of life doesn't depend on our knowledge of all the facts. It depends upon our heart attitude to lay down our lives in submission to Christ. If we don't receive Christ as a little child, we shall not enter life. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Mark 10:15).

Receiving Christ and being born anew, i.e., being born of God, does not happen by going to church. John the Apostle said that it doesn't occur by being born into a Christian family; it's "***not of natural descent***" (John 1:13). One person has said that God has no grandchildren. What he meant is that we cannot get into the kingdom of heaven because our parents know Christ, and it's not by being married into a Christian family, i.e., "***a husband's will***." Your spouse being a Christian is not enough. Receiving Christ requires each of us to abandon all we have and all we are into His hands. John writes that those who believe in His name are given the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

What Does it Mean to Believe in Christ?

The act of believing is not just an intellectual acknowledgment of the work of Christ on the cross for our sake; it is placing our faith and trust in Christ alone. We can use the analogy of Blondin, the great tightrope walker who crossed from one side of Niagara Falls to the other side. After crossing the 1,000-foot tightrope numerous times, he turned to the crowd and asked them if they believed that he could take one of them across. After a roar of approval where most acknowledged that he could do it, he then proceeded to ask them one by one to get on his back and come with him. They wouldn't do it. Believing in Christ is putting our trust in Him. It is not merely an intellectual belief that is required; it is receiving Him into our lives and letting Him carry us from that day onward. Can we receive Christ like a child today?

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me (Revelation 3:20).

Repentance is Required

...unless you repent, you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:5).

...Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38).

...God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world (Acts 17:30-31).

For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Charles Spurgeon said, "Sin and Hell are married unless repentance proclaims the divorce." Do not allow yourselves false repentance, for many people who appear to repent are like sailors who

throw their goods overboard in a storm and wish for them again in a calm.”² Repentance means to have a change of mind and heart towards God. This change of heart involves a change of direction in the way we have been living. The important thing is to examine your heart and consider whether you have practiced true biblical repentance from sin. Have you asked for the Holy Spirit to cleanse you and renew you? Do you genuinely want to be free from habits that stain your character and soul and cause pain in your life and the lives of others around you? If we have truly repented of all known sin, the Spirit of God will illuminate the things that we need to let go of, the things that we need to give up or change. However, that is not all! The Holy Spirit is faithful to lead us into truth. God supplies not only the roadmap to redemption but also the vehicle to get us to our destination. Repentance in the Scriptures describes a man waking up to his own need and turning around towards the Father (Luke 15:17-20).

Confession of Sin

When we talk about confession of sin, we refer to being vulnerable to God about the deeds we know to be wrong. Confession literally means *to say the same thing* and agree with God about your sin. Do not try to rationalize as to why you did a certain act, or why a certain sin He points out to you is not so bad. Own your sin and ask for forgiveness. Satan is the one who whispers in your ear that it was not so bad. Resist such thoughts and cast yourself upon the mercy of God. It is wise to get alone with God and unburden yourself of specific sins that the Holy Spirit brings to your attention. He knows everything about you anyway, so you can't hide anything from the Lord:

Whoever shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33).

...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (Romans 10:9-10).

Assurance of Salvation

Several years ago, a young girl came to the elders of a church desiring to become a part of the church. First, she was asked, “Did you ever find out that you were a sinner?” “Yes,” she said without hesitation, “I did indeed.” The second question put to her was, “Do you think, my girl, that you have changed?” “I know I have,” was the immediate reply. “Well,” the question came, “and what change has come over you?” “Well,” she said, “it's like this. Before I was converted, I was running after sin. Now, I am running away from it.” This character change is evidence of a born-again experience; it's both a change of attitude and a change of direction.³

Let's take some time to go over some of the evidence of a person being born-again (John 3:3), but beware that these things are not seen as checkmarks of things that you can do. They are the fruit of an inner change brought about by the Holy Spirit and not by our flesh.

- 1) Do you honestly believe the Gospel? We are not talking about a mental acknowledgment of the message's truth, but a heart belief that lives out godly values in

² Compiled by John Blanchard, *Gathered Gold*. Published by Evangelical Press, 1984, page 262.

³ A. Naismith, *1200 Notes, Quotes and Anecdotes*, Printed in England by Marshall Pickering, 1963, Page 41

your daily life. Your life will show if you believe it or not. Jesus said, “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?” (Matthew 7:16). There should be growing evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in your life (Galatians 5:16-25).

- 2) Is there a thankful and loving heart of appreciation toward the Lord Jesus for dying on the cross for you?
- 3) Do you have a hunger to know God’s Word? “But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him” (1 John 2:5).
- 4) Is there anticipation in your heart for the return of Christ? ²“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3 Emphasis mine).
- 5) Are you upset and disappointed with yourself when you sin? If you have invited Christ to sit on the throne of your life and have given Him control, the Holy Spirit will convict you when you sin.
- 6) Do you love others that love God? Do you enjoy being around other Christians? “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death” (1 John 3:14).
- 7) Do you have a conscious awareness of the Holy Spirit at work in your life? If so, then this also is evidence of the life of God at work in you: “We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13).

³⁷All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day” (John 6:37:40).

Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life (John 5:24)

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

This kind of love is staggering to the human mind, i.e., the God of the universe dying in my place, taking the punishment I deserve for my sin upon Himself. The great British cricketer and a missionary, C.T. Studd, once said, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.” If there was no other way than that Christ should die in my place for my sin, then it proves the sinfulness of sin and how important it is to God for the guilt of my sin to be put away for me to have fellowship with God. We should do everything in our

power to put our sins behind us and walk out the rest of our lives seeking to obey God in all things.

What is your response to the Word of God? Maybe today, you would like to pray a simple prayer, believing and trusting Christ and His finished work on the cross. Here is a simple prayer of trust:

Prayer: Father, I believe with all my heart that Jesus came to give me life. Today, I trust Him and His finished work on the cross for my sake. I have sinned and done things wrong in my life. I turn from my sin toward Christ. Thank You for sending Your Son into the world to save me from my sin. Come into my life, Lord Jesus, and cleanse me of my sin. I want to receive You today. Amen!

If you prayed that prayer, we would love to hear of your response to this message. You can email us at the address below. To study more about the Lord Jesus, go to the website address below:

Keith Thomas

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com