

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

Everybody wants to be happy. People try, primarily, three different ways.

Some people look for happiness through acquiring possessions. Get, get! Get all you can, can all you get, sit on the can and spoil the rest! That's the philosophy of many people. "I'll be happy if I just get more things."

Some people look for happiness by experiencing pleasure. They'll try this drug or that pill or that experience or that trip -- looking for pleasure to be the meaning of life.

Some people look for happiness by gaining prestige and power. They think, "If I'm just liked, if I'm just famous, if I'm popular then I'll be happy in life."

But the fact is real happiness comes from understanding it's not pleasure, possessions or power. **But from understanding my purpose.** That's where real happiness in life comes from. Understanding your purpose in life. Why are you here?

Why am I here? What's the problem with it? What's the solution? What does God want me to do?

I. WHY AM I HERE?

The Bible teaches very clearly that you were put on this earth for two reasons:

1. God made me to love me! God says, *"I have loved you with an everlasting love."* Ephesians 1:4-5 *"Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be His through our union with Christ because of His love. God had already decided that through Jesus Christ He would make us His children. This was God's pleasure and purpose."*

You were created to be loved by God.

2. We were created to enjoy a personal relationship with God and to manage all of the rest of God's creation! This makes us special. *"So God created human beings, making them in His image. He blessed them and said 'Live over the earth and bring it under control. I am putting you in charge.'"*

The Bible says *"God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."* God said, I am putting human beings over all the rest of creation and you are to manage the rest of the world. He gave that responsibility to Adam and Eve and then on to us. The benefit is that when we manage it as God's representative we get to enjoy it.

Jesus said in John 10:10, *"I have come in order that you might have life, life in all its fullness."* If Jesus came to give us life it means we're not really living until we know Jesus. In fact, you're not living. You're just existing, until you know Christ because you were made to love God and be loved by Him, to know him and be known by Him.

3. When we know and love God it produces all kinds of positive benefits in our lives. It provides a clear conscious. It provides purpose in life, power and strength, life and peace, confidence, fulfillment. He gives us help with out weaknesses. He gives us security. He gives us freedom. These are all benefits of having a relationship to Christ. I'm not talking about a religion. I'm talking about a personal relationship with Christ.

This is the kind of lifestyle that God intends for us to live. Why then aren't most people really happy?

II. WHATS THE PROBLEM?

Here's the problem: **Man has a natural desire to be boss and to ignore God's principles for living.** You can see this all the time in our society around us. You hear phrases like, "Look out for number one... Do your own thing... If it feels good, do it regardless of what God says." In other words, "It's my life and I'll do what I please" or as the great theologian Frank Sinatra sang, "I did it my way." We want to be our own boss. We don't want God to be our boss. We want to be our own boss. **The Bible calls this attitude sin.**

In the word "sin", circle the middle letter. The center of sin is "I". I want to do my own thing. I want to be my own boss. I want to live my own life the way I want to regardless of God. The Bible says we've all had this problem.

"All of us like sheep have gone astray and each of us have turned to his own way."(Isa. 53:6) Today we'd say, "All of us have gone astray and everybody's done their own thing."

"If we say we never sin we're only fooling ourselves and we refuse to accept the truth." (1 John 1:8)

The sad part is that sin breaks our close relationship to God and it causes us to fear God and to try to live our lives outside His will. It's amazing how most people are afraid of God. If you're standing around talking with a bunch of friends at work and you bring up God, all of a sudden they freeze up. They get nervous. It's because people are afraid of God. Why? Because they want to be their own boss and they know that the relationship between them and God is broken. They may not understand it but they feel it.

Isaiah 59:2 says *"The trouble is that your sins have cut you off from God."*
Romans 3:23 says *"All have sinned and fall short of God's glorious ideal."*

When it says "all", does that include Billy Graham? Yes. The pope? Yes. Everybody reading this? Yes. We have all sinned. There's no perfect person in the world. When people have problems they often try many different ways of coping before turning to God. When we have this relationship that we were meant to have with God and it's broken, when we feel this emptiness inside, we don't always know that what we're yearning for is God. So instead of looking to God to fill this emptiness, we try all kinds of things. Alcohol, drugs, an affair, therapy, thrills... They're trying to fill the emptiness in their heart when really what they're longing for and they don't know it is a relationship with God. That's why you were made and nothing will ever satisfy that except a relationship with God.

Even when we know our deepest need is God we often try the wrong ways of getting to know Him:

"My mother was a Christian so I must be a Christian." That's what some call salvation by heritage. That's not very logical. For instance... what if I said, "My mother was married therefore I'm married." I'm not automatically married just because my mother was married. I'm only married if I make the choice to get married, whether my mother ever married or not. So you're not saved by heritage.

"It doesn't matter what you believe, just be sincere." The problem with that is you can be sincerely wrong. I could sincerely think something is water, but it's

arsenic and I'd be sincerely dead. I read about a guy in an airplane who sincerely flew into a mountain and killed himself. He thought he was higher but he wasn't. He was sincere. You can be sincerely wrong.

In northern California where 600 people followed a man sincerely to Guyana and later 900 were killed in that Guyana tragedy. His name was Jim Jones. I pastored an elderly couple in Kentucky whose children died in Guyana. They followed a man they thought was sincerely right. But he was sincerely wrong.

It takes more than sincerity to get to heaven.

"I'll just give up all my bad habits." That's what I call salvation by subtraction. "I don't do this and I don't do that... I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't cuss, I don't chew, I don't run around with girls that do." If being a Christian is a matter of just not doing a lot of things, then everybody who's dead qualifies as a Christian, because they don't do anything.

No, the Christian life involves far more than just a bunch of don'ts.

"I'll work real hard and earn it." That's salvation by service.

"I'll be religious and go to church."

Here is the myth that most people have. They think in their mind that God has a scale and on one side are my bad works, all the bad things I've done, and all the other side are all the good things. If somehow I manage to do more good in my life than bad then God's going to let me into heaven.

That's just not true. In the first place, the Bible says heaven is a perfect place. Only perfect people get to go there. If God let imperfect people into heaven, then it wouldn't be perfect any more. You say, "If only perfect people get to go to heaven, then I don't stand a chance." You're right. You don't and neither do I. So God had to come up with Plan B whereby we could get in on somebody else's ticket who was perfect. His name was Jesus Christ.

God doesn't grade on a curve. God says to come to a perfect place you have to be perfect. So if you could live a perfect life and if you were to never sin and you were to come to God and He said, "Why should I let you into My perfect place?" you'd say, "Because I've never blown it." He'd say, "You deserve it. Come on in." But you missed that chance a long time ago. And so did I. So we need plan

B. Plan B was God saying, "I'll come to earth in the form of a human being and I'll be called Jesus Christ. I will live a perfect life and I'll let people see what God is really like in human form. Then I'll die on the cross and pay for their sins so, if you trust in Me, you can come into heaven on My ticket." It sounds like a good deal to me!

III. WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Look at what Jesus said. *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me."*(John 14:6) Notice Jesus didn't say, "I might be the way ... I point the way ... I teach the way ... I'm looking for the way." He said, "I'm it!" Then He said, "I'm the Truth."

I've studied all the major religions of the world. One of the things that I discovered was that all the major religions point to truth. In Japan, it's called Truth. Buddhism says truth is found through an eight-fold path and if you strive all your life, you may eventually discover the truth. But Buddha at the end of his life in a famous statement said, "I'm still searching for the truth."

The Hindu scripture says truth is very illusive and you'll probably never find it. It's like a butterfly and just about the time you grab it, it'll fly off.

Others say truth must be searched for by purifying yourself by chanting and maybe you just might get to the truth.

Mohammed said, I'm a prophet and I point toward the truth.

Then Jesus comes along and He says, *"I am the Truth."* Not, "I point to it... I teach it ... " But *"I am the Truth."* He's either who He says He is or He's the biggest liar who ever lived. He said, "I am the Truth. I am the Way. I am the only way to heaven."

God, Himself, came to earth as a human being to bring us back to Himself. If any other way would have worked, Jesus Christ would not have had to come. The **Way** is not a religion, the **Way** is not a path, the **Way** is a person. God wants you to know Him personally.

Jesus has already taken care of your sin problem! *"The wages of sin is death, [that's the bad news; then the good news] the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*(Rom. 6:23)

What does it mean to be a Christian? It means to put your faith in Christ. There are so many myths about what it means to be a Christian.

A guy on the plane one day who said, "I'm an American, therefore I'm a Christian." America's a Christian nation.

Another guy said, "I joined the church, so I'm a Christian." If you join the Lion's Club, does that make you a lion?

People say, "I was born in the church." If you were born in a car, does that make you a spare tire?

People say, "I got baptized." You could be baptized in the ocean till every fish knows you by your first name but that's not going to get you to heaven.

It takes more than just knowing about.

People say, "I believe about God." So does the devil. He knows there's a God but you're not going to find him in heaven.

So what's the difference? It means to **believe in** Christ. God did this for us because He loves us and wants us to know Him. *"God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still separated from God by sin, Christ died for us."* (Rom. 5:8)

God is on the one side and all the people are on the other side and Christ Jesus is between them to bring them together by giving His life for all mankind. God has already done His part to restore our relationship to Him. He took the initiative. He came to earth. Now He waits for each of us to individually accept what He's done.

Review: Heaven is a perfect place. We're imperfect. There's not a chance in a zillion you're ever going to get to go there on your own good works. You'll never be good enough. So God came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ -- that's why we celebrate Christmas and Easter. He died on the cross to pay for my sins and He says, "If you'll accept Me, you can come into heaven on My ticket. Not only that, you can begin to experience real life here on earth right now."

IV. What does God want me to do? Four things:

1. Admit, THAT GOD HAS NOT BEEN FIRST PLACE IN YOUR LIFE AND ASK HIM TO FORGIVE YOUR SINS. Here's what it means to be a Christian. You may be a church member. You may have known about God all your life. You may have wondered, "Am I really a Christian?" Maybe you've had doubts about it. You can know for sure right now. I don't want any of you to leave this web-site without knowing for sure that you've settled this issue. First you admit. I admit that God has not been first place in my life and I ask Him to forgive my sins. *"If we confess our sins He's faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from every wrong."*
(1 John 1:9)

2. Believe, That Jesus Christ died to pay for my sins and that He rose on Easter and is alive today. *"If you confess that Jesus is your Lord, and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*(Rom. 10:9) Circle the word "will". It doesn't say you might be. It doesn't say you can hope to be. It says you will.

Many Christians go through all their life wondering, "Have I really given my life to Christ? Am I really going to go to heaven?" They doubt their salvation over and over. You need to settle it right now. If you call on the name of the Lord He says, "I will". God will not lie. It doesn't matter how you feel. Feelings come and go. I stood one day in front of a bunch of people and said two words to my wife Joyce that changed my life, "I do". At the time I had no idea what I was doing. The rest of my life I'm working out the implications of those two words, "I do".

As Joyce and I were driving off on our honeymoon, If I had said, "I don't feel married." She would have said, "It doesn't matter whether you feel it or not. You're married!"

There are some days I don't feel saved. Does that ever happen to you? There are some days I don't feel like a Christian. Feelings come and go. What matters is God says, "I will save you if you do what I say and invite Me into your heart."

3. Accept, God's free gift of salvation. Don't try to earn it. *"It is by grace you are saved through faith and it is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not of works so no one could boast."*(Eph. 2:8-9) Can you imagine, if you could earn your way to heaven, what a cruddy place heaven would be? If you could earn your way to heaven, everybody up there would be bragging on how they got

there. "I got here because I helped a little old lady across the street!" "I got here because I was like Mother Teresa." No, you don't get there on your own effort. You get there just by accepting God's free gift.

Our relationship to Christ is not restored by anything we do, but on the basis on what Jesus Christ already did for us on Calvary.

4. Invite, Jesus Christ to come into my life and be the director or Lord of my life. Have you seen these stores that say, "Under new management"? I think every new Christian should wear that sign for a month. That's what it means to be a Christian. I'm under new management. No longer am I calling the shots in my life. Jesus Christ is the manager of my life. He's the CEO. He's the President, the boss-man. He's the director of my life.

"To all who receive Him, He gives the right to become the children of God. All we need to do is to trust Him to save us. All those who believe this are reborn. Not a physical rebirth but from the will of God."(John 1:12-13) Circle "receive" and "believe". What does it mean to be a Christian? You must believe and receive.

Let's say you're standing on one side of a great canyon without Jesus Christ and headed for hell. Over on the other side of the canyon is the promise that you can become a child of God and headed to heaven. How do you get from one side to the other? You walk across a bridge. And who's the bridge over troubled waters? Jesus Christ. And how do you get across the bridge? You must believe and receive.

If I were to ask you, "How far are you along that bridge?" Some of you would say, "I believe in Jesus Christ. I just don't know if I've ever received Him into my life." I'd say, Congratulations. You're halfway there! What you need to do is invite Him into your life. How do you do that? Jesus says, *"Listen! I stand at the door [of your heart] and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in."* (Rev. 3:30)

You can take these steps by praying a simple prayer of commitment to God. If you've never settled this issue or if you've always had doubts, "Am I really a Christian? Do I know for sure I'm going to heaven?" You can know for sure by doing what Christ has said to do, by praying this prayer and meaning it in your heart: **"Dear Jesus, Thank you for making me and loving me even when I've ignored You and gone my own way. I realize I need You in my life and I'm**

sorry for my sins. I ask You to forgive me. Thank You for dying on the cross for me. Please help me to understand it more. As much as I know how, I want to follow You from now on. Please come into my life and make me a new person inside. I accept Your gift of salvation. Please help me to grow as a Christian. Amen."

The Bible says, *"Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."* (Rom. 10:13)

Did you call on the name of the Lord? God says if you call on the name of the Lord you'll be saved. Will God lie? No! Then are you saved? Yes!

If you meant that in your heart. It's not how you feel, it's what is real. And what is real is a commitment to Christ. You don't understand it all. The day you were born, did you understand everything about the world? When you are "spiritually reborn" you don't understand all about the Christian life. You can't expect a baby Christian to get up and be running a marathon or be a Billy Graham. You have to grow as a Christian. That's what this church is all about. We're here to help you grow.

If you'd like help or have questions or you'd like to share you're new commitment to Christ with us, please email me at the link below. God will bless you as you follow his plan and purpose for your life!

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