

Are You A Christian?

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Are you a Christian?

“Yes,” you say, “I am.” Or perhaps you answer, “No, I’m not.” Or even perhaps, “I’m not sure,” or, “I don’t know.”

If you answered with the last response, this pamphlet will help you find out for sure whether or not you are.

If you answered “No,” you may have a false view of what a Christian actually is. This pamphlet will give you a more accurate concept of what the biblical writers taught concerning how a person becomes a Christian and what actually makes a person a Christian.

And if you answered “Yes,” this pamphlet will solidify your understanding, or perhaps even change it. The purpose of this presentation is to carefully define how a person becomes a Christian, as well as to know what a Christian actually is *according to the Bible*.

The Importance of the Gospel

Even among Christians there is confusion as to what the gospel is and what it is supposed to do. Paul says in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes....” Paul indicates that the gospel (good message) of Christ is the power of God. By “power” Paul means that the gospel is able, by itself and without addition or subtraction, to supply all the necessary information that results in salvation.

What is salvation, you might ask? Simply stated, salvation is the removal of the penalty of sins. When an unbeliever becomes a believer, God removes the penalty of sins so that the believer is not liable to eternal condemnation. However, according to Paul, this provision is only available to those who believe. Belief, or faith is the means by which the gospel benefit is applied.

What is the Gospel?

Since the gospel is God's power resulting in salvation, we should be able to determine what the gospel is. Paul tells us specifically in 1 Corinthians 15:1, “I declare to you the gospel....” From there Paul presents the specific facts that one must know in order to understand the gospel message. Two historical events make up the gospel, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel, Part One

First Paul says, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4a). God requires a death for sins. Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ became obedient unto death and provided Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, He acted as our substitute because He died for our sins so that we are not required to do so.

Paul gives the fact of Christ's death two proofs. First, Christ's death is according to the Scriptures. One can read in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John of the historical facts of Christ's death. Second, Christ was buried. When the Roman soldiers were satisfied that He was dead, they allowed Christ's followers to remove His body from the cross and to place it in a tomb.

The Gospel, Part Two

The second part of the gospel is that Christ rose from the dead.

This in turn is proven by two facts. Again Paul gives the proof, “according to the Scriptures.” In the four gospels mentioned above, we read repeatedly of the proof of the bodily resurrection of Christ. For example, we read in Luke 24:38 and 39 that Christ speaking to the disciples after the resurrection said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” Shortly after that, the Lord Jesus ate fish and honey in their presence.

The second proof is that Christ was seen. In 1 Corinthians 15:58 Paul describes the various times Christ was seen by credible witnesses, “He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have

fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”

The simple gospel is that Christ died for our sins, and that He rose from the dead. While it is within human experience for one person to die for another, the resurrection from the dead is another matter. In order to be a Christian, a person must believe that at least one impossible event (from a human viewpoint) took place. Christ actually bodily rose from the grave.

What about Faith?

Faith, or belief, is the way God applies the truth of the gospel to the individual. Concerning the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:2 Paul says, “by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.” The gospel saves a person if they believe. But they must believe “not in vain.” The words “in vain” means “without a purpose.” In other words, saving faith is purposeful faith. To believe the facts of the gospel without believing that the work of Christ actually saves the believer constitutes “believing in vain.”

You may be one who has believed in vain. You may think you are a Christian because you both believed and also performed good works. Such belief is in vain. In Ephesians 2:8 and 9 Paul says “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it *is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” If one believes that works saves them in any sense, they are not a Christian. Purposeful faith is limited to believing the gospel. Christ's work on the cross and His resurrection are sufficient for salvation. The individual can add nothing of value to Christ's finished work.

You may think that you are a Christian because you “asked Jesus into your heart,” or because you “prayed to receive Christ.” But one does not become a Christian by asking or by praying. Salvation is available only by faith, that is, by believing the gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:16

Read again the complete statement by Paul concerning how a person becomes a Christian.

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.”

The next time someone asks you, “Are you a Christian?” what will you say? Will you say, “Yes, because I believe the gospel for the purpose of being saved?” Any other answer means that you are not a Christian in the sense that the Bible means.