





## What is a Christian?

No other question is so surrounded with confusion or answered so variously. Ask ten different people this question and you will get five or six different answers. Here are six opinions which are commonly held about the essence of Christianity.

- "Well, I certainly am a Christian; I'm doing the best I can. I try to live by the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount."
- 2. "Most assuredly, I'm a Christian. If I'm not, I don't know who is. My mother and father are very religious. I have an uncle who is a minister."
- "Indeed I am. I have always gone to church and Sunday School. I have been baptized and confirmed. I joined the church when I was fourteen."
- 4. "I know I'm a Christian because when the evangelist gave the invitation I went to the front and made a decision for Christ. My counselor showed me that if I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior, I would never be lost again. I didn't want to be lost—hell is a terrible place—so I accepted Jesus, and I know now that no matter what happens, God will never reject me. I know it because I went to the altar and professed faith in Jesus Christ."
- I don't know if I am, and I don't see how anyone can really know for sure in this life. I guess I'll just have to wait until I die to find out."
- 6. "Sure, I'm a Christian. Isn't everybody? Isn't God the Father of all men? We may be going by different roads, but all of these roads lead to the same place. It doesn't really matter what you

believe, just so you are sincere—everyone who is sincere in his own religion is a Christian."

These and many other answers have all been given to the question, "What is a Christian?" Who is right? Are any of these answers right? Can we know what it means to be a Christian, or must we be forever uncertain? Well, if we look to the human mind, to human opinion for the answer we will flounder in a sea of uncertainty. One man has as much right to his opinion as another. But, if we look to and are willing to submit to God's Word, our confusion may be dispersed.

In the Bible you will find many statements such as these: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119: 105). "The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes." (Psalm 19:7-8). "And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (2 Timothy 3:15-16). These Scriptures tell us that God has given us the Bible to make us wise in spiritual matters. Therefore, it only makes sense that we should turn to the Bible to find an answer to the question "What is a Christian?" If we want to travel to a certain city, we get a map and discover the best way to go. We don't turn to some person who has never been there for directions because he doesn't know any more about it than we do. Nor do we turn to a philosophy or science book for directions. No, we turn to a map of the area in which that city is located because that map was made to give us directions. So it is with the Bible. It was produced by the inspiration and superintendence of Almighty God that we might be made wise concerning the way of salvation.

#### What Does the Scripture Say?

Since one of the purposes for which God gave the Bible was to tell us the way of salvation, let us test the six common opinions which were stated previously against the standard of the Bible. What do the Scriptures say about the six common answers given to the question, "What is a Christian?"

#### Answer #1: Salvation is by good works.

Scripture says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; *and that not of yourselves*, it is the gift of God; *not as a result of works*, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9, emphasis added). From a positive point of view these verses state that salvation is by grace. The word "grace" means unmerited favor. Positively speaking, salvation is the free gift of God. From a negative point of view these verses teach that salvation is not of works so that no one may boast. Again the Scriptures state that "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5-6). Similarly the Bible affirms that "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).

#### Answer #2: Salvation is by heredity.

Scripture says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). This passage affirms that physical heritage, blood lineage, family connections or any other such factors, do not have anything to do with whether or not a person is a Christian. Another passage of Scripture which teaches the same truth is Philippians 3:4-5.

#### Answer #3: Salvation is by religious activity.

Scripture says, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from my, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:22-23). Other Scriptures which demonstrate that a Christian is not simply one who is active in religious matters are Mark 7:1-7; John 3:1-8; Luke 18:9-14; Philippians 3:6-7; Galatians 1:14-15; Psalm 51:16-17.

#### Answer #4: Salvation is by a past religious response.

Scripture says, "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man" (John 2:23-25). These people made a profession of faith but our Lord would not trust Himself to them because He knew that their profession of faith was not real. Other Scripture passages which teach that merely professing faith or going through certain mechanical actions does not ensure that a person is a Christian are Acts 8:12-24; John 3:36; James 2:14-26; 2 Corinthians 5:17.

#### Answer #5: No one can know for sure.

Scripture says, "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." (I John 5: 13). Other Scriptures which teach that a person can know that he is truly a Christian are John 5:24; Romans 8:1; 2 Peter 1:4-11.

#### Answer #6: Everyone will be saved.

Scripture says, "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 3:18). "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36). "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Other Scriptures which teach that not everyone will go to heaven are Revelation 20:11-15; Ephesians 2:2, 3; Colossians 3:6.

#### Conclusion

When tested by the standard of God's Word, these six common answers to the question, "What is a Christian?" are proved to be inadequate and false. All of them are contrary to the Word of God. According to the Bible, if your answer to the question "What is a Christian?" is any one of the six opinions that we have just considered, you are wrong. According to the Bible, if the basis for your hope of heaven is founded upon any one of these opinions, your hope is based upon a wrong foundation and you are not a Christian. Why? Because a Christian is not simply a person who performs good works; or a person who has been born of Godly parents; or a person who is active in religious matters; or a person who has made a profession of faith; or a person who has been baptized; or a person who has responded to an invitation.

Well, if these answers are not the correct answers to the question, "What is a Christian?" How does the Bible answer this question? Let us notice four things that the Bible says about a person who is a Christian.

### How the Bible Defines a Christian

# First, the Bible declares that a Christian is a person who has been radically changed by the power of God.

Many different Bible phrases enunciate this truth about a Christian. Some verses assert that a Christian is a person who has been created anew in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 2:10; Galatians 6:15). Other Bible verses state that a Christian is a person who has become a partaker of the Divine nature (2 Peter 1:2-4). This means that when a person becomes a Christian, he receives a new nature from God. It is divine in two senses: (1) it is created and put within us by God (James 1:17); (2) it is a holy nature even as God's nature is holy (1 John 2:29; 3:7; 1 Peter 1:15-16). Still other Bible verses testify that a Christian is a person who has been begotten or born of God (James 1:18; 1 John 5:1; John 1:12-13). Then too, the Bible states that a Christian is a person who has been regenerated or made to live again (Titus 3:5) In addition to this, the Scriptures affirm that a Christian is a person who has passed from death unto life and been raised from the dead (John 5:24-25; Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13; Luke 15:24, 32).

These various biblical phrases describing a Christian abundantly testify to the fact that a Christian is a person who has been radically changed by the power of God. Becoming a Christian is a supernatural operation of God upon the spirit of man. Becoming a Christian is not merely a matter of outward reformation; it is not merely a matter of turning over a new leaf and endeavoring to live a new life; it is not merely a matter of education or of religion. Nature may be educated to the highest standard attainable, but it cannot be developed into something of a totally different order. There is no process by which a man may be developed out of a horse nor a beast out of a bird. Likewise, there is no process by which a spiritual man can be developed out of a sinful man by education. I may gather some weeds out of a field and transplant them into my garden; I may fertilize and irrigate them, but no amount of attention will transform them into rose bushes. Education and religion cannot change man's sinful nature. They can only refine it.

Becoming a Christian is the implanting of an entirely new nature within man. It is being born again, being born from above, being made a new creation, being remade and reoriented at the center of one's being. J. C. Ryle described the change that takes place when a person becomes a Christian like this:

Once he could see no beauty or excellence in the Lord Jesus Christ, he could not understand some minister speaking so much about Him. Now he would tell you that Christ is the pearl of great price, the chiefest among ten thousand, his Redeemer, his Advocate, his Priest, his King, his Physician, his Shepherd, his Friend, his All.

Once he found no pleasure in the means of grace. The Bible was neglected. His prayers, if he had any, were a mere form. Sunday was a tiresome day. Sermons were a weariness, and often sent him to sleep. Now all this is altered. These things are the food, the comfort, the delight of his soul.

Once he disliked earnest-minded Christians. He shunned them as melancholy, low-spirited, weak people, now they are the excellent of the earth, of whom he cannot see too much. He is never so happy as he is in their company. He feels that if all men and women were saints, it would be heaven upon earth.

Once he cared only for this world, its pleasures, its business its occupations, Its rewards. Now he looks upon it as an empty, unsatisfying place, an inn, a lodging, a training school for the life to come. His treasure is in heaven. His home is beyond the grave.

See what an amazing gulf there is between the man who is a Christian in name and form; and the one who is a Christian in deed and truth. It Is not the difference of one being a little better, and the other a little worse than his neighbor; it is the difference between a state of life and a state of death. The meanest blade of grass that grows upon a highland mountain is a more noble object than the fairest waxed flower that was ever formed, for it has that which no science of man can impart—it has life. The most splendid marble statue In Greece or Italy is nothing by the side of a poor, sickly child that crawls over the cottage floor, for with all its beauty, it Is dead. And the weakest member of the family of Christ Is far higher and more precious in God's eyes than the most gifted man of the world. The one lives unto God, and shall live forever; the other, with all his intellect, is still dead in sins.

I do not hold that all must have exactly the same experience. I allow most fully that the change is different, in degree, extent, and Intensity, in different persons. Grace may be weak, and yet true; life may be feeble, and yet real. But I do confidently affirm we must all go through something of this kind, if ever we are to be saved. Till this sort of change has taken place, there is no life in us at all. We may be living church men, but we are not Christians.

Sometime or other, between the cradle and the grave, all who would be saved must be made alive. The words which good old John Berridge had engraved on his tombstone are faithful and true: "Reader! art thou born again? Remember! no salvation without a new birth."

The Christian then is a person who has been radically changed by the supernatural power of God. This wonderful work of God is usually carried on in connection with the preaching of the Bible. First Peter 1:23, 25 reads, "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God... But the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word which was preached to you." James 1:18 declares, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that

we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." Ephesians 1:13 reads, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." Romans 10:17 testifies, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." First Corinthians 1:21 says, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

As the word of God is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit wings those words like arrows into the hearts of sinners. The word breaks through the high walls of sin and creates new life at the center of the sinner's personality. He then begins to think differently. He begins to think God's thoughts after Him. He feels differently. His likes and dislikes change so that he loves the things of God. His will works differently. He decides to break with sin, believe on the Lord, and follow Jesus Christ. He now begins to pattern his life according to the truth of God instead of according to his own opinions or the opinions of other men. All of this is the result, not of man's own efforts, but of the supernatural power of God, who is at work in that person's life.

# Second, the Bible declares that a Christian is a person who has become and is becoming increasingly aware of his own unworthiness in the sight of God.

He realizes that he is a sinner by practice. He realizes that he has broken the laws of God and thus deserves to be condemned by God. The Christian reads of the prodigal son who wandered away from his father and wasted his substance in riotous living and he says, "I am that prodigal son who wandered away from my heavenly Father and wasted all that God has given me in riotous living." He reads of the prodigal coming to himself and recognizing how he has grieved his father and says, "I am that prodigal who has come to the realization of how I have sinned against my heavenly Father and grieved him." He reads of the prodigal coming to the father and saying, "I have sinned against heaven and in your sight and am no more worthy to be called your son," and says, "I need to confess my sins to my heavenly Father." He reads the declaration of John that "everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4), and he says, "I have sinned because I have transgressed the law of God. I have broken God's commandments. I am a sinner by practice."

But the Christian is a person who is not only aware that he is a sinner by practice; he also is becoming increasingly aware that he is a sinner by nature. He recognizes that the nature with which he was born is a nature that is in rebellion against God and which if unrestrained is capable of the worst of sins. He reads of Paul saying in Romans 7:24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" and he says, "I know what Paul is talking about, 'I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."" (Romans 7:21-23).

A Christian is a person who comes to God as David did in Psalm 51 and says, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness. Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

He is concerned not only about sinful actions but sinful attitudes. He is concerned not only about sinful deeds but sinful thoughts. He believes that Jeremiah was describing his heart when Jeremiah said,

"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). The Christian accepts God's statements about the depths, the potential, and the consequences of his sins. The Christian doesn't know fully the depth of his guilt but he knows and senses that God would be perfectly just in condemning him to hell. Thus he comes to God not to bargain or barter but to plead as the publican in Luke 18:13, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"

The Christian doesn't know fully the depth of his corruption, but he is aware that his "old nature" (the nature with which he was born) is incurably wicked and capable of great wickedness. He is aware that his carnal mind was enmity against God and could not be subject to the law of God (Romans 8:7-8). He is aware of his need for a new heart, for a new nature. He is in full agreement with Jesus Christ who said, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). The Christian then is a person who recognizes that if the Lord would keep track of sin, no one could stand (Psalm 130:3). He revels and rejoices in the fact that salvation is all of grace. He has no confidence in the flesh to save or to keep himself saved. He is cast completely on the Lord and upon His mercy. (Other verses which teach that we are sinners by practice and nature are: Romans 3:9-19; 3:23; 8:7-8; Psalm 10:4; 53:1-3; 58:3; 143:2; 2 Chronicles 6:36; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Genesis 6:5; Proverbs 22:15; Jeremiah 13:23; Mark 7:21-23; John 3:19; 8:34, 44; Ephesians 2:2, 3; 2 Timothy 3:4; 1 John 1:10.)

#### Third, the Christian is a person who believes that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh and the only Savior and substitute of sinners.

In Matthew 21:10 when Jesus came riding into the city of Jerusalem on the day that we celebrate as Palm Sunday, the whole city was stirred and began to ask the question, "Who is this?" This is a tremendously important question because there has never been another person who has affected the history of the world or the individual lives of people as has the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible unmistakably tells us who Jesus Christ is. Any person who is uncertain about the identity of Jesus Christ is uncertain either because he has never studied the Bible or because he is not willing to accept what the Bible has to say about this person Jesus Christ.

Many passages of the Bible affirm the humanity of Jesus Christ. Romans 5:15 declares that "the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many." First Timothy 2:5 affirms that, "there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." First Corinthians 15:21 asserts that "since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead." In John 8:40 Jesus Christ said, "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth." Because of the abundant scriptural evidence which speaks of the humanity of Jesus Christ, the Christian believes that Jesus Christ is truly a man—like all other men with one glorious exception.

The Bible says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But Jesus Christ knew no sin. Hebrews 4:15 asserts that He "has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." In John 14:30 Jesus said, "for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in me." First Peter 2:22 reads, "[He] committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth." First John 3:5 asserts that "in him there is no sin." Second Corinthians 5:21 declares that "he knew no sin." Jesus Christ perfectly, continuously, and absolutely fulfilled the will of the Father. He never had to go to bed feeling guilty. He never had to go to bed wishing that he hadn't said something that he had thought, or wishing that he had not thought something that he had felt, or wishing that he had not done something that he had done. He lived a perfectly sinless life. In this respect he was different from all other human beings. Other Scripture passages

which teach the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ are: John 8:29; 17:1-4; Luke 1:35; Matthew 3:17; 27:4; 23:41; Luke 1:35; Mark 1:24; 1 Peter 1:19; Hebrews 7:26; 9:14.

However, the Bible not only teaches that Jesus Christ was a perfect man. it also teaches that Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh. Jesus Christ was more than a great man. He was very God of very God. He was not merely a great human teacher who came to show men the way to God. He was God who came to reveal God to man. The Bible, speaking of Jesus as the Word of God, the perfect revealer of the Father says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). The Bible teaches that the eternal Son of God left heaven and took on human nature, being conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus himself said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Frequently in the Bible Jesus Christ is called God. In Hebrews 1:8 God the Father speaks to Jesus Christ and says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever." John 20:28 tells us that Thomas fell at the feet of Jesus Christ and said, "My Lord and my God." First John 3:16 asserts "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Titus 2:13 speaks of the "appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." First John 5:20 reads, "and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

The Bible also indicates that Jesus Christ is God by applying to Jesus Christ in the New Testament, Old Testament passages which refer to Yahweh. In Isaiah 40:3 the Bible says to "clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness." John the Baptist quotes this verse of Scripture in the New Testament in reference to Jesus Christ. Isaiah 6:1-4 tells us that Isaiah saw Yahewh. In John 12:41 we are told that the one that he saw was Jesus Christ. In Joel 2:32 we read "And it will come about

that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered." Romans 10:13 quotes this verse in reference to Jesus Christ.

These two facts, namely, that the Bible calls Jesus Christ God and that Old Testament passages referring to God are applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament, give abundant proof that Jesus Christ is God. Add to these facts, the biblical facts that Jesus Christ possesses the attributes of God, that Jesus Christ performs the works of God, that his name is associated with God the Father in an equalitarian way, that there are biblical statements which clearly teach that He is God, that He claims to be able to do things that only God can do, and the certainty of His deity is irrefutably established (Matthew 10:32, 37; 18:20; 28:19-20; Mark 2:5-12; Luke 4:16-21; 24:27, 44; John 1:1, 3, 29; 2:25; 3:13, 36; 5:17, 46; 6:35; 8:12, 56-58; 10:27-30; 11:25, 26; 14:9-11; 21:17; Acts 10:43; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 1:3; Philippians 2:5-6; Colossians 1:14, 16-17; 2:9; 1 Timothy 3:14-16; Hebrews 1:3, 10; 4:12-13; Revelation 1:8; Isaiah 9:6).

A Christian is therefore a person who believes that Jesus Christ is God and man mysteriously, indivisible and yet distinctly joined in one person. He believes that Jesus Christ has a divine nature and that He also has a human nature. This is a mystery to the Christian but since it is clearly taught in the Bible, the Christian believes it and thus the Christian humbly bows to the teaching of the Word of God. He believes what he cannot perfectly understand. He cannot nor does he try to eradicate or erase the biblical truth that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man. He accepts both of these facts, submitting to the clear evidence of the Word of God.

The Christian not only believes that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, he also believes that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh for the purpose of saving unworthy hell-deserving sinners. The very heart of the Bible is found in the words, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). Jesus Christ Himself explained His coming when He said, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). The angels of God explained the purpose for His entrance into this world when they said, "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. . . . I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Matthew 1:21 and Luke 2:10, 11). The Christian believes that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of sinners. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." The Bible declares, "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. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 14:6; 3:18; 3:36). "And 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 4:12).

The Christian believes that for Jesus Christ to save sinners he became their substitute. He believes that Jesus Christ took the place of sinners before the law of God and obeyed for sinners the law that they were unable to obey. In part, the atoning work of Christ consists in fulfilling the exacting requirements of God's law which Adam and then we as his descendants failed to obey. Jesus Christ said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). Romans 5:19 declares that "even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous." Philippians 2:8 declares that Jesus Christ became "obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." Hebrews 5:8-9 tells us that Jesus Christ was perfect in obedience to the Father. Romans 10:4 asserts that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." The Christian then believes that Jesus Christ became man that he might perfectly keep the law of God in the stead of sinners. Jesus said, "For I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29).

The Christian also believes that Christ made atonement for the law that sinners had broken. The Bible asserts "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed," "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (1 Corinthians 15:3; Isaiah 53:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; Romans 3:24-26; 5:6-11; Ephesians 1:6-7; Galatians 3:13).

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, all are transgressors of God's law, and according to eternal justice all deserve to die, all deserve God's wrath and curse "for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them'" (Galatians 3:10; Romans 3:9, 19; James 2:10). But Jesus Christ came and in the place of His people He satisfied every charge that the law of God had against them. He paid their penalty by His death upon the cross and fully satisfied every claim that divine justice might have against His people.

One Christian has said:

When one day we shall come before the throne of judgment—and we shall come before the throne of judgment, make no mistake about that—the law may point a finger at us. 'Have you sinned?', it will ask. To which we must reply that we have sinned, daily, constantly, in all our actions and words and even our thoughts. Then the law may reply, 'What have you to say for yourself?' Blessed are we if then we may say, 'I have sinned, I have broken all thy demands, and I cannot pay the terrible debt that I owe. My Savior, however, Jesus Christ, saw my lost condition and took pity upon me. In love He came and paid the debt of my sin. I cannot atone for my sin; I cannot pay the debt. But Jesus Christ has paid the debt; He has shed His blood for me.' Then the law will answer, 'I have nothing to say against those for whom Christ has died. He has fully satisfied all my claims.' Oh blessed condition, if on that last day we may be found in Christ! Then it matters not how great is the guilt of our sin. Make it mountain high, yet Jesus Christ has atoned for all. If men reject this, yet God will not, for Christ has paid our debt. Blessed work of satisfaction! Satisfaction: it is precisely that which Christ has done. Upon the basis of His work God's law will say, 'I am satisfied. I have no claims against those for whom He died.' If Jesus has thus removed the grounds for our condemnation, God may freely and honestly pardon and receive us to Himself. He no longer holds our sins against us, and even more than that He looks upon us as righteous. He tells us that we may stand in a right relationship with Him.

God accounts us as righteous, it is well to note, not because of any righteousness of our own, nor for anything at all within us or done by us. He accounts us as righteous for the sake of Christ alone. He lays unto our account all that Christ did for us. Just as the terrible guilt of our sin has been imputed (that is, reckoned or laid to the account of) to Jesus Christ, so God's perfect righteousness (His obedience and work of satisfaction on the cross) is imputed to the sinner. And upon the basis of this imputed righteousness, God tells the sinner that he is right with Him.

When Christ died on the cross, He paid the debt of our sin. Christ, however, did not remain in the tomb. He is the mighty God and on the third day He arose from the dead.

This every true Christian believes. He believes that Jesus Christ is God and man united in one person who went to the cross to die in the stead of sinners and then rose again that sinners might be justified.

# Fourth, the Bible teaches that the Christian is a person who has repented of his sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the one who saves. The faith and the repentance of the Christian do not save him. The Christian recognizes that his faith and repentance do not merit him the favor of God. He comes to God saying,

> Not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy law's demands; Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears for ever flow, All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and thou alone.

Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling; Naked, come to thee for dress, helpless, look to thee for grace; Foul, I to the Fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.

But while the Christian realizes that his repentance and faith do not merit him the favor of God, he still recognizes that faith and repentance (which are gifts of God) are the means by which that salvation becomes his own personal experience and possession. Jesus Christ said, "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." "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (John 3:18, 36; 10:25, 26; Luke 13:3; 5:32; John 11:25-26; Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 3:19,26; 10:36-43; 11:18; 17:30; 20:17-21; 26:19-20; Revelation 3:17-20).

The Christian is a person who has **repented** of his sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. What does it mean to repent? To repent "is to be sorry for sin and to hate and forsake it because it is displeasing to God." True repentance involves sorrow for sin and a hatred of sin—both internal and external sin—a sorrow for what I am, as well as what I do—for the corruption of my heart as well as the perversity of my conduct—for the attitudes which prompt the actions as well as the actions themselves. Isaiah cried, "Woe is me, for I am ruined!" (Isaiah 6:5). The publican prayed, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13). The thief on the cross said to the other thief who was mocking Jesus: "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:40, 41; 2 Corinthians 7:9-11; Joel 2:12; Jeremiah 31:18; Psalm 119:104; Ezekiel 20:43).

True repentance involves **sin**. It involves not only a change of attitude toward sin but also a change of action in regard to sin. The Bible says, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7). "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion" (Proverbs 28:13). Furthermore, true repentance involves sorrow for sin and a forsaking of sin because it is displeasing to God. The person who is truly repentant doesn't sorrow over sin and forsake it just because he is afraid of the consequences, but primarily because

he has displeased God. This grieves him and causes him to turn from sin. More than anything else the truly repentant person wants the smile and the favor of God. He hates sin and forsakes it because he knows that God hates sin (Ezekiel 36:25-32; Zechariah 12:10; Luke 15:18; Psalm 51:1-12; Luke 22:59-62). The true Christian has repented of his sin. He is sorry for his sin. He hates his sin and he is constantly forsaking his sin because it is displeasing to God. Unless a person has done this, he has no right to believe that he is a Christian. Jesus said, "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3).

The Christian, however, is not simply a person who has turned *from* sin; he is a person who has turned *to* Jesus Christ in faith. The Bible says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). When a person turns from something, he either does it because he has already turned to something or because he wants to turn to something. The sinner does exactly that. He turns from sin to holiness; from self to the Savior. Repentance is turning from and faith is turning to. Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. Repentance is the negative aspect and faith is the positive aspect. You may be sure that a person has not truly believed unless he has repented; nor has a person truly repented unless he has believed on Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ means to trust in or rely upon Christ alone for salvation. The Bible declares, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life," and "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already" (John 3:36; John 3:18). To believe involves reliance upon; it involves resting your weight on Christ. It involves commitment to Jesus Christ. Commitment is the crowning element of saving faith. Commitment is simply a giving of oneself to Jesus. This is well illustrated in the physical realm when a patient actually submits to the operating surgeon by undergoing an anesthetic, thus literally putting his life into the doctor's hands. So, also, when a sinner puts himself into the hands of the great physician, Jesus Christ, calling upon him to heal him of the deadly disease of sin, he trusts the Savior and the Savior alone for salvation. This is the exercise of saving faith; and all degrees short of the element of commitment are not saving faith. I shall not be delivered from the wrath to come by believing simply that His atonement is sufficient; but I shall be saved by making that atonement my trust, my refuge, and my all. The pith, the essence, of saving faith lies in this—a casting of myself on Jesus Christ. It is not the life buoy on board the ship that saves the man when he is drowning, nor is it his belief that it is an excellent and successful invention. No! He must have it around his loins or his hand upon it or else he will sink. Thus it is with saving faith. We must actually commit ourselves unto Jesus, body, soul, and spirit.

One preacher has illustrated saving faith in this manner. Imagine that a fire breaks out in the home where a young boy is asleep on the upper floor. The boy's father and mother wake up and get all the children out but somehow they miss little Billy. They don't realize that he is still in the building until they are all outside. Then the horrible truth dawns on them as they gather their children around and find Billy missing. The father tries to go back into the house to rescue his little boy, but he is blocked by a sheet of flame which he cannot get through. Meanwhile Billy wakes up and smells the smoke. He opens the bedroom door and is met by a wall of fire which makes it impossible for him to get downstairs. He closes the door and runs to the window. He looks down at the concrete three stories below. If he stays where he is, he will be burned to death. If he jumps, he will be dashed to pieces. It looks hopeless until his father sees him, holds out his arms and shouts, "Jump, Billy, I will catch you." Billy knows that his father is strong enough to catch him, but does that make him safe? Billy knows his father loves him and is willing to catch him but does that make him safe? Billy not only knows his father is willing and

able to catch him but that his father is pleading with him to jump, but does that make him safe? None of these things will save him unless he trusts his father enough to jump. If Billy will not commit himself to his father's arms, he will perish.

**Saving faith** does not merely involve knowing that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh who came into the world to save sinners by perfectly keeping the law for them and by offering himself as an all sufficient sacrifice for sin on the cross of Calvary. It does not merely involve knowing that Jesus Christ is able to save, nor that Jesus Christ is willing to save. A person may know all of this and still perish. Saving faith involves the actual casting of myself upon Jesus Christ and trusting Him alone for my own salvation. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30-31).

In another place the apostle Paul said, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.... For whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:9-10, 13). It is not enough to believe about Jesus Christ, we must believe on and in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must cease from trusting in our own goodness, our own works of righteousness, our own baptism or church membership, our own keeping the law of God and rest completely upon the Lord Jesus Christ who is the all sufficient Savior of sinners. We must cease from our "do it yourself," "make up your own mind," "run your own life" attitudes and acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the Lord of our lives. We must commit ourselves wholly and unreservedly to Jesus Christ for time and eternity. Jesus said, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27). This every true Christian has done. He has repented of his sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Conclusion

What then, in summary, is a Christian? A Christian is a person who has been radically changed by the power of God. A Christian is a person who has been deeply convicted by the Holy Spirit of his own unworthiness before God and of his desperate need of God's mercy. A Christian is a person who believes that Jesus Christ is the God-man who came into the world to be the only Savior and Substitute of sinners. A Christian is a person who has genuinely repented of his sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. He has actually looked unto Jesus Christ for salvation and called upon Jesus Christ for salvation.

Having seen the clear teaching of Scripture on the essence of Christianity, I want to press home a very personal question at this point—can you honestly say that you are a Christian? Remember the essence of Christianity is not any of the things that we mentioned at the beginning of this booklet. We have seen from the Bible which is the only book to which we can turn for an answer to the question, "What is a Christian?" that these are false answers.

If you have been clinging to these illusions about Christianity, turn from them to believe what the Bible has to say in answer to the question, "What is a Christian?" Turn from your own opinions and the opinions of others to the infallible Word of God "which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). Ask God to impress upon you your own unworthiness and to reveal to you His Son Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save all sinners who would come to him. Call upon his name to save you now, for his promise is that "whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). Ask Him to forgive your sins, thank Him for dying in the place of lost sinners, confess Jesus Christ before men as the Lord and Sovereign of your life and be assured that if you have sincerely done this or will do this, you may stand up before God and men and confess, "by the all availing and powerful blood of Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit who has now worked in my life, I am a Christian.

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Certain portions of this booklet are either quotes from or paraphrases of the Great Commission Publication's booklet *Are You a Christian?*; J. C. Ryle's *Alive or Dead*; or A. W. Pink's *The New Birth*.

This booklet has been slightly revised from the original to update the Bible translation and make minor corrections.



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