

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

(John 3:16)

The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.

(John: 6:29)

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

(Romans 10:9)

Believe: from *Pisteuo* (Greek): to have faith (in, upon, or with respect to a person or thing), by implication to entrust, to believe, commit, put in trust with.

(from *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*)

What Is A Christian?

Most of the things you find on this website have been written for people who are already believers, because this ministry is primarily for people who are (or at least consider themselves to be) Christians. But I want to address those who, for whatever reason, are not.

I realize there are a host of reasons why a person is not a believer, and I hope to address those reasons as this ministry progresses. But one of the key reasons I think people do not believe is there is a great deal of confusion over just what *is* a Christian. It's not as easy a question to answer as you might think, especially since we've all heard about things the Lord Jesus said, then turned around and saw people who supposedly believe in Him doing – in His name – the exact *opposite* of what He said. (I sometimes think we need to ask "What would Jesus *not* do?" as much as what He would.)

The simple answer to the question is this: *A Christian is someone who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of Almighty God, to the point that the person accepts His sacrifice to forgive his or her sins.* This is being written during the Christmas season, when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, but we have to keep in mind that the entire point of the Incarnation (the Second Person of the Trinity coming into the world in human flesh) was the events of Good Friday; the idea was for Him to die as a sacrifice so that humankind may be set free from its sinful nature.

Or, in other words, the whole point of the *crèche* is the *cross*. God is Holy and cannot tolerate deliberate disobedience to His Will, as Lucifer and the angels he talked into rebelling against God found out. (And this actually makes sense; most of the "gods" of ancient times were often extensions or projections of *human* qualities... but would you *really* want to serve a god who is like *you*?) However, God also has the quality of infinite, perfect love, love that calls what He creates "good" (refer to Genesis 1:31) and does not give up

on it. When it comes to us as His creation, this leaves him with a paradox of sorts.

You see, by our own act of the will we are not holy; our nature – programming, if you will – to do what is against God; the Bible calls this *sin*. And so, the paradox before God is this; He could have easily wiped us all out and started all over again, but He loves us and does not want to do that. (He called us *good*, remember?) At the same time, His Holiness demands that sin be judged, and it can only be properly judged by death. (Yes, I know that there are people who do rotten, evil things for years, even decades, and seemingly never pay the consequences for their actions in this life. But like all of us, these people eventually die and must face the Judgment of God for their actions; no getting away with anything, no second chances, no going back until you “get it right” – once you die, the choices you make in this life determine your... *accommodations*... in the afterlife, where there is no bargaining or “upgrades.”)

So, what does God do? His plan is for a *substitute* to pay the punishment for sin; or, in other words, someone or something to die in the *place* of the guilty party. To teach the principle in preparation for its final expression, God first used animal sacrifices, but this only covered sin and could do nothing to take it away. He had something that worked far better in mind – one final, ultimate sacrifice that would solve the problem and resolve the paradox once and for all. A perfect, sinless human to die in the place of all humanity to pay the penalty for sin. And, because no human born in the usual manner is sinless (and, thus, incapable of doing the job), God decided to take on the job Himself and come into the world in human form. God’s Righteousness and Holiness, thus, was satisfied, and yet humanity is not destroyed and still around for Him to show His love to. And, to show that His Will is *not* death but life, He even decided to conquer death in the process and raise the sacrificed One back to life again, where He lives now with God the Father.

So now, the way is open for everything we have ever done wrong, no matter how slight or how great, to be forgiven and for us to be with God once we die. (Now, don’t get all defensive – if you’re honest, you know the wrongs you’ve done, just as I know the stuff I’ve done that I needed to have wiped clean. Every last one of us needs forgiven for or delivered from *something*, and there are no exceptions.) But this is not a blanket pardon or a declared general amnesty, but a transaction *done on an individual level* between you and God; there is a point where a person must accept as a deliberate act of the will Jesus’ sacrificial death as payment for his or her own, individual sins, and *voluntarily submit* to the Lordship of Jesus. Now, the Scriptures speak of Jesus buying our lives with His Blood, and thus now we belong to Him; this is true, but there is more to it than that, more of a deep, simple *gratitude* for the One who saved you from the executioner by taking your place at the gallows and living the rest of your life for your redeemer.

The distinction is important, because you can claim Jesus is the Son of God until the day you die, but not necessarily *do* anything about it. Salvation

is the free gift of God, but what good is a gift that sits on a shelf somewhere *unopened*? A gift has to be deliberately *accepted* and *opened* by the recipient to be of any benefit to that person at all.

And, perhaps, the best part of this arrangement God offers us is that it opens the way to so much more than we can imagine. While many people view Salvation and the Christian life that it leads into as drudgery, the end of whatever you may view as “fun,” it is in reality the best deal you will ever be offered. The petty, insignificant pleasures a person lives for – which, at worst, destroy us and, at best, will come to an end one day even before you die no matter what you do to keep them going – are literally nothing compared to the things God has in store for us, if we would turn to Him and live our lives His way. Keep in mind, God knows us better than we ever will and He has plans for us that will lead to our happiness and contentment far more perfectly than we will achieve by our own efforts. Sometimes, this means God opening doors for us to what we already suspect He wants for us, and sometimes it involves things we wouldn’t believe even if He told us openly. Our part in this is to trust Him that He knows what He’s doing and to let Him do as He pleases, as the Greek word for *believe* cited at the beginning of this message suggests. And that means, letting go of our pride and accepting from God that which He extends to you. Sometimes, that is the hardest part of the transaction we must make with God because we have to humble ourselves to take what He offers. But it opens the way to so much more.

God has done everything He can do – or will do – to make all this available to us. The way is through His Son, Jesus, as He Himself said:

I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

(John 14:6)

The only thing missing is *you*; what do you intend to do about all this? I can urge you as strongly, as earnestly as possible to take God up on His offer, to accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord, but I cannot *make* you do it... and wouldn’t even if I could, because a decision made under coercion is not what God is after; a *forced* conversion is no conversion at all. In presenting this, I am merely doing what God calls all believers to do – be a witness for Him and tell you the good news (the Gospel). I also pray that God is speaking to your heart as you read this to persuade you to accept Him. And you can do that right now, by asking Jesus to come into your life, forgive your sins and be the Lord of your life. I offer you the following as a guide for you to pray; you can put it in your own words if you wish, but the important thing is that you speak to God *from your heart* in all honesty with Him:

Lord Jesus Christ, I ask you now to please come into my life. I believe that you are the Son of God, that you died to pay for my sins and was raised from the dead by God the Father. I accept you now as my Savior and as my Lord; please forgive my sins

and give me a new heart to live for you and I will serve you all the days of my life. Please do this now, I pray, in Your Name, Amen.

If you prayed that and meant it, then God says you are a New Creation in Him (refer to 2 Corinthians 5:17), but you'll probably know that in your own heart without having to be reminded. Now, there are a few things you need to do and right away:

1. **Tell someone.** It is important to establish your new identity as a believer with others as soon as possible, because one of the first tricks Satan will try to pull is to persuade you that what just happened didn't *really* happen. Telling others makes it harder for you to believe that lie.
2. **Get a Bible and start reading.** The best choice is a translation that is easy for you to understand. (My preference is the New International Version, the one the quotes are generally taken from, but there are more contemporary language versions out there.) If you prefer the King James Version, that's fine, too; it's all good – just get one and start reading in the Gospel of John, which perhaps stresses love of God toward us all more than the others. Then read the other Gospels, then the rest of the New Testament. You can begin on the Law and the Prophets – the Old Testament – once you have a good grasp of how the Law and the Prophets were fulfilled in Jesus.
3. **Find a Church.** Other believers are a great help in your new life with the Lord, and worship of God *with* other believers is essential *to* believers. Look especially for one that preaches *all* the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and does not pick and choose only what they like from the Bible. This can be a mainline denomination (Catholic or Protestant) if they are open to the leading and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, or it can be an independent church, or it can be as simple as a Bible study at someone's home.
4. **When in doubt, pray!** God has given you the Holy Spirit – the Third Person of the Trinity – as a guarantee of your new status with Him (refer to 2 Corinthians 1:22). Jesus said He also serves as a guide into the things of God (Acts 16:12-15). Because of this, you can talk to God *at any time*. This will be an immense advantage, since you will run into some churches (and some believers) that have, frankly, some ideas about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit that have little to nothing to do with the Bible. The Holy Spirit can steer you away from such pretenders and toward where God wants you to be and what He wants you to do.

And, if you would, please, let us know at the ministry's e-mail address, especially if you have any questions. I pray that God will guide you into a decision that brings you both together.

For the Glory of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ
© 2008, *Anno Domini*, Rankin Family Ministries, Inc.