

616 What Must I Know to Become a Christian?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

Whether to become a Christian is the most important decision you'll ever make. It will not only affect the rest of your life, but obeying the gospel will make a difference in the hereafter. Deciding to follow Jesus is more important than what college you attend, what vocation you choose, or what spouse you marry. However, whether you become a Christian will likely affect every other important decision you will make. Such a decision is not one you should make lightly or hurriedly. There are some things you should think through, and we're asking what should I know to become a Christian?

Now great crowds accompanied him, and he (Jesus) turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:25-33). In this message, Jesus emphasized the need to "count the cost" in becoming a Christian. Of course, Jesus wants everyone to become a disciple, but he also wants them to know what is required of them as disciples. The cost of discipleship is high, and one should know what he is getting into.

Jesus demands in this passage that one love Him more than any member of the family. Jesus demands that one take up and bear his own cross to be a disciple. A Christian cannot allow anything to come between the Lord and himself. You see, becoming a disciple of the Lord is not something that an immature or uncommitted person can do. A person has to know what he is doing and why he is doing it. He or she must also have a love for God willing to pay the price of carrying a cross. Jesus calls us to conviction and to a total commitment of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength to Him and to His cause. There is no greater blessing than to become a Christian, but there is no greater responsibility.

I would not want anyone to be like the man who started building but couldn't finish or like the king who was not ready for a battle. We must be ready and willing to commit ourselves fully to Christ. Peter said in 2 Peter 2:21, "For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them." Jesus said in Luke 9:63, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." Jesus wants commitment for a lifetime. Like the old song says, "no turning back, no turning back." We must carry our cross all the way to the end, never giving up and never forsaking the Lord who loves us.

Christianity is a lifetime of believing. We must believe in Christ, in His death on the cross for our sins, in His burial, and in his resurrection on the third day. Paul spoke about the most important aspects of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." To be a Christian one must believe and take his stand on these truths. He will be saved only if he holds fast to his faith. Faith is not an option for the Christian. Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Jesus said in John 3:18, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." What you believe matters to God. He wants you to believe that Jesus is His Son.

Jesus as the Son is authoritative. To reject the things he teaches is to reject Him and to reject the Father. Jesus said in John 12:48, "The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day." To say no to Jesus our Lord has serious consequences. We will be judged on the last day by the things Jesus said, not by our feelings or by the traditions of men. Solomon said many years ago in Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." Many people trust their own feelings or instincts rather than listen to the Words of Jesus, only to find out that their feelings have misled them.

We need to believe that Jesus is Lord and speaks the truth. How can we ever follow Jesus if we only believe and trust Him when we choose? Selective faith is not faith at all. Selective obedience is not obedience at all. If Jesus is our Lord, then we belong to Him as His servants. He has the right to make decisions for our lives, but we can trust Him to love and take care of us, always doing what is best for us. We need to take every command seriously just as we take every promise seriously. Jesus will never lie to us or try to fool us. We can believe His every teaching will lead us to righteousness and blessing. His commands are not grievous or burdensome. We can trust Him.

So, when Jesus expects us to repent, we too should go and sin no more. We must learn to leave the old life of sin and put on a new life that is like the one Jesus lived. To be His disciples we must follow in His steps. We can't continue to live or think like worldly people. If we belong to Him and follow His teachings, then we must put away sinful habits. Paul said in Colossians 3:5-10, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." Being a Christian means that you will change your thinking about right and wrong, good and evil. Paul advised in 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22, "But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil." The Christian who loves God and others will "Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9), because he wants to please God. His whole way of thinking changes since the Lord is now a part of his life.

Repentance is really the hardest part of becoming a Christian. One begins repenting at conversion and spends his life growing from worldliness to godliness. We all have much to learn from the Lord and grow in our faith and knowledge of His will. God doesn't expect

new Christians to be fully grown overnight. The more you study the word of God, the more you will be able to discern the good from the bad. I don't have to know everything to become a Christian, but I will begin a new life as a Christian wanting to learn everything I can about the will of God and to grow in my obedience to His will day by day. As my heart changes toward God, so will my actions change to conform to that will.

If I believe in Jesus and have changed my heart to want to leave evil and serve Him, there is still one more thing I must do: I must be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins. In the New Testament, only people old enough to understand were baptized. In Acts 8:12, Luke writes, "But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike." The words "men" and "women" refer to males and females of full age and stature. They were not infants or little children; they were old enough to believe and make up their own minds. In fact, there is no mention of infant baptism anywhere in the New Testament. In Acts 5:14, Luke says, "And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." We have no record of baptizing infants until the latter part of the second century, and the writer, Tertullian, opposed it. In Mark 16:15-16 Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved"; and in Acts 2:38 Peter said, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Faith and repentance, according to the Scriptures, was to precede baptism. Salvation only comes when a person is taught, believes, repents and is baptized.

Now if one is going to be baptized, he should know what he is doing and why. Baptism is not a mindless ritual but a meaningful act of union with the Lord. In baptism, God unites a person with the Lord Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection. Paul said in Romans 6:3-7, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin." When a person is baptized, he needs to know that he is being baptized into Christ's death, where the Lord shed his blood. Baptism may take place in water physically, but that is when he spiritually comes into contact with the blood of Jesus, which cleanses him from sin. His old man of sin is crucified with Christ and is buried in baptism, so that he like Christ can rise up to walk in newness of life. There is no new life until one is raised up with Christ, at which time he is free from sin.

When early Christians were baptized, they knew that by being baptized they were uniting with Christ. From that time forward their

relationship with Christ was solidified. He was their Lord and their Savior. They understood that in being baptized their sins were at that time forgiven. You remember what Ananias told Saul of Tarsus (or the apostle Paul), "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). The old man of sin has to die for one to be free from sin, and that happens when one dies with Christ and is cleansed by his blood. They also understood that when they were baptized they became part of the body of Christ, the church.

In Acts 2:41, Luke writes, "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." Later in verse 47, Luke says, "And the Lord added to their number (that is, the church) day by day those who were being saved." When I become a Christian the Lord adds me to His church. The idea that I can serve the Lord on my own and without the church is never contemplated in Scripture. There is no "Jesus, yes; but the church, no." When I married my wife, I married into her family; and she married into mine. When you unite with Christ, you also unite with His family, the church. You can't have one without the other.

Jesus loves His church; He purchased it with His blood. And if you wish to come to Jesus, you will come to Him only as part of that blood-bought church. He had no other plan. Being a member of the church means that you will get involved in its work and attend its assemblies regularly. I hope that you out of love are thinking of uniting with Jesus by believing, repenting, confessing His name, and by being baptized. I'd love to hear that you have decided to do that today, and I pray with all my heart that you will.

Christianity is a religion of faith in Christ and in His word. John wrote in John 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The Bible was written to give us faith, so that in believing we can have life. There is no life apart from faith. Paul said in Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." This is why we preach the Word to build faith. It is the gospel that has the power to save (Rom. 1:16) and to bring about our new birth (1 Peter 1:23).

When we believe that word and obey it from the heart, we cease to be slaves of sin and become servants of God. Christianity is a religion of the head as well as the heart. We must know what we are doing and must be willing to do it with all our hearts. It is a shame when someone just goes through the motions not knowing what he is doing or being apathetic. God wants us to give ourselves fully to Him as people who love Him completely and know what we are doing and why we are doing it. I hope that you are considering obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ and wanting to serve Him all your days. It starts by becoming a Christian and changing your relationship with Him. Why not do that today?

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