

CHAPTER ONE

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

A. THE BIG QUESTION

How do you know if you are a Christian? What must you do to be saved? Does going to church or being a good person make you a Christian or guarantee you eternal life? Does it really matter what you believe? These are all questions of eternal importance.

When it comes to eternal considerations, nothing matters more than making sure you qualify for eternal life in heaven. What are the qualifications?

B. THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR ETERNAL LIFE

1 John 5:11-13

Who grants eternal life? _____

Where is it found? _____

Who has eternal life? _____

Who doesn't have eternal life? _____

A person who believes in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, can _____ (choose correct word) that he has eternal life.

☐ Hope

☐ guess

☐ wish

☐ feel

☐ know

☐ pray

ETERNAL LIFE: Eternal life is not only a quantity of life, or a span of timelessness in which to live, but also it is a quality of life that includes abundance. It is the God-kind of life that Jesus lived.

C. HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE?

Do you *know* for sure that you have eternal life?

1. Yes, I know that I have eternal life. _____

How do you know? _____

2. No, I am not sure I have eternal life. _____

If you are not sure you have eternal life, or if you have questions you would like to have answered, then the study in Scripture that follows will clarify that *knowing* for you.

D. WHO IS JESUS?

Christianity revolves around one central Person: Jesus Christ. Jesus is the most unique Person in history. He claimed to be God! This claim puts Jesus in a different league than any other religious leader in history.

1. Jesus claimed to be God.

Was Jesus Christ truly God? Was His birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection proof of His claim that He was God manifested in the flesh?

a. What did Jesus say about Himself?

John 4:25,26 _____

John 10:30 _____

John 14:8,9 _____

b. What did others say about Jesus?

John 1:1,14 (John) _____

John 20:25-28 (Thomas) _____

John 5:18; 10:33 (Jews) _____

Colossians 1:15-18 (Paul) _____

c. What do you say about Jesus?

_____ I believe He is God.

_____ I am not sure what I believe at this time.

I believe _____

2. Jesus came for a purpose.

John 10:10

Why did Jesus come to this earth? _____

In your own words, describe abundant life as you understand it _____

Who is the thief? _____

Why did he come? _____

Are you experiencing abundant life, or are you experiencing a lifestyle lacking in meaning, joy and purpose? _____

Describe your life. _____

3. Jesus rose from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:3-6

What did Jesus do that no other person has done? _____

How many people saw Jesus after His resurrection? _____

If Jesus truly rose from the dead, as the Scriptures say, then He is still alive. How does His resurrection affect our faith in Jesus today? _____

E. WHO ARE WE?

We have looked at Who Jesus is. Now let's look at who we are. Do we really need Jesus? Why do we need a Savior? What is our condition apart from God?

1. Is everyone a sinner?

SIN: To sin means “to miss the mark.”¹ We could understand sin in terms of archery — that is, to sin means to miss the bull’s eye. When an arrow hits any of the rings outside the bull’s eye, it has missed the mark. In the same way, our fallen human nature (which we inherited from Adam, the father of the human race) has caused us to miss the bull’s eye of God’s perfection. We have missed the mark of God’s glory. The fallen human nature is a sin nature (a nature that misses the mark).

a. Romans 3:23

Who has sinned? _____

There is a difference between our sin nature and our sinful acts. Sinful acts are the *result* of our sin nature. It is the sin nature that God is primarily concerned with. This inherited sin nature separates us from God. If God can change the sin nature in us, then our desire to commit sinful acts will also change.

b. Romans 5:12

To whom has death come? _____

DEATH: Three types of death are described in the Bible: spiritual death, physical death and the second death (also called eternal death). If a person is not born again, his spirit (or heart), the part of him that contacts God, is separated from God — he is spiritually dead. Spiritual death is not cessation of being; rather, it is a separation from God. Physical death occurs when life departs from the physical body. The second death will occur after the Great White Throne of Judgment when everyone who has not received the Lord Jesus Christ (whose names are not found written in the Lamb’s Book of Life) will be cast into the lake of fire, eternally separated from God. (See Revelation 20:11-15.)

2. Where did sin come from?

a. 1 John 3:8

Who has sinned from the beginning? _____

What does this say about those who sin? _____

b. John 8:44

Who does Jesus say is the father of these religious leaders (unbelievers)? _____

In what way did they imitate their father? _____

We can see from the Scriptures that Satan is the father of all sin and the father of all those who reject Jesus as their Lord.

3. What are the results of sin?

a. Isaiah 59:2

What is the result of sin? _____

b. Romans 6:23

What are the wages of sin? _____

4. What is our condition apart from God?

a. Ephesians 2:1-3

What is our condition before we meet Christ? _____

When we walk according to the course of this world, whose influence are we under?

How many of us lived in this condition? _____

b. Mark 7:21-23

What is the condition of our heart without Christ? _____

c. Matthew 23:27

How does this verse describe those who act religious but who still have an ungodly, unbelieving heart? _____

d. Ezekiel 36:26,27

What did God promise He would do to solve the problem of man's heart? _____

Mankind is in a dilemma. First, we see that Jesus came to give us an abundant life; but, because of the fall of man, we have a sin nature and have become separated from God. We

have lost our access to the abundant life. Sin has separated us from God and from the abundant life Jesus promised. What did Jesus do to solve the sin problem?

F. JESUS DIED FOR PEOPLE LIKE US

Jesus died for people just like you and me. We might look clean and polished on the outside, but apart from Christ we are void of true life. Sin has been the problem of man's heart since the Garden of Eden, but Jesus came to solve the sin problem once and for all. Jesus came to give us a new heart (or spirit); but in order to do so, He had to give His life. Jesus hung upon a cross and gave His life so that we could have eternal life.

1. 1 Peter 3:18

Why did Christ suffer and die? _____

For what purpose? _____

2. Hebrews 9:22

Under the Old Covenant, the Israelites were required to sacrifice a spotless lamb and shed its blood to atone for (to cover) their sin. If they neglected to do this, their sin was held against them. In the New Covenant, Jesus came as the spotless Lamb of God to shed His blood once and for all to forgive the sin of all mankind.

If Jesus hadn't died and shed His blood, what would have happened to our sin? _____

3. Romans 5:8

For whom did Jesus die? _____

G. JESUS WILL GIVE US A NEW LIFE

1. 2 Corinthians 5:17

What happens to a person who is in Christ? _____

What happens to a person's old life? _____

2. John 3:1-6

Jesus told Nicodemus that a person cannot enter the kingdom of God unless he is what? (vv. 3,5.) _____

BORN AGAIN: Being born again is also called the “new birth.” When you are born again spiritually, you receive a recreated heart (spirit) from God; that is, your heart or spirit is born again and is now in contact or in relationship with God. Another way to explain this is that when your spirit or heart is born again, God gives you a new nature.

This new heart (or spirit) gives you a new nature and brings you into a father/child relationship with God. You are actually transferred, or adopted, into the family of God. You become a child of God and a member of His family through the new birth. A preacher once said that it isn’t important what *church* you belong to, it’s important which *family* you belong to.

3. John 1:12

How does a person become born again and become a child of God? _____

4. Colossians 1:12,13

What family (kingdom) have we been delivered from through the new birth? _____

What family (kingdom) are we translated into? _____

H. IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY TO GOD?

We have looked at the condition of our heart before God, and we have seen God’s provision for cleansing us of our sin through the blood of Jesus and giving us a new nature or heart (or spirit) because of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe you find yourself thinking, *This seems so straight and narrow. Isn’t there any other way to get to God? Isn’t there any other way to get eternal life?*

What if a person believes in God but not in Jesus Christ? There are many different beliefs about God, Jesus and eternal life — as you can tell by the multitude of religions. The strongest and most sincere beliefs, however, will not change the facts. What are the facts? Again, we must turn to our source, the Word of God, for the facts. Let’s look at the Scriptures and see if there is another route by which we can get to God.

1. Matthew 7:13,14

Describe the way that leads to life (eternal). _____

2. John 14:6

Did Jesus say He was "a way" or "the way"? _____

Who goes to the Father apart from Jesus? _____

3. Acts 4:12

Is there any other name given whereby we can find salvation? _____

4. 1 Timothy 2:5

How many mediators are there between God and man? _____

Who is the Mediator? _____

5. 1 John 2:22,23

A person who denies Jesus is the Christ is called what? _____

Does a person who rejects the Son have the Father? _____

Is there any way a person can believe in the Father and not believe in the Son? (v. 23.) _____

6. 1 John 4:15

In order for God to live in you and for you to live in God, Whom must you confess? _____

7. Ephesians 2:8,9

What about religion and good deeds? Man's ego wants to **do** something to be saved. What does this verse call salvation? _____

Is salvation something we earn by being religious or by doing good works? _____

Can we take any credit for obtaining salvation? _____

SALVATION: This is the all-inclusive word of the gospel! The use of this word in the Bible includes forgiveness of sins; deliverance from danger, captivity, and judgment; health and healing of the body; help, welfare, safety, victory, freedom from prison, preservation of life and physical health; final and complete deliverance from all the curse, including death.² Salvation is a free gift. Gifts are not earned, they are simply received.

Jesus won't force Himself on you, but you can receive Him, if you will. God has provided the one and only answer for the problem of man's heart condition (or fallen nature), and that answer is Jesus. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for our sin. It is up to us to believe on and receive Him.

I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BELIEVE AND RECEIVE?

1. John 3:16

Who can believe in Jesus? _____

What are the results of believing? _____

Becoming a Christian involves **believing** on the name of Jesus and **receiving** Jesus Christ as Lord.

2. Romans 10:9

What are we to confess with our mouth? _____

What are we to believe in our heart? _____

What are the results? _____

CONFESS: We receive salvation by a combination of what we say with our mouth and what we believe in our heart. "To confess" means to acknowledge, to agree with and to say the same thing as. To confess our belief in Jesus as Lord means to acknowledge, and to agree and to say that Jesus is Lord.

To say that Jesus is Lord is to say that He is **your** Lord. Think about what that means. It is not something to be taken lightly or just spoken casually. When you take Jesus as your Lord, you are giving Him control of your life. You are turning the steering wheel of your life over to Him. You are putting yourself in a position of submission to His leadership.

Certainly Jesus is capable of directing your life much better than you are. Since He knows your future, in detail, He can direct your paths into what is best for you. Although Jesus is the Lord of all creation, He gives you the opportunity to exercise your free will and to make Him your personal Lord.

3. John 12:42,43

What does God say about those who don't confess Jesus as Savior? _____

4. Matthew 10:32,33

What does Jesus promise if you confess Him before others? _____

J. PERSONAL APPLICATION

How do I become a Christian?

After looking at the qualifications for eternal life, you may be asking the question, "How do I become a Christian?" Becoming a Christian is the most important decision you will ever make. Your eternal destiny depends upon your decision to accept or reject Jesus Christ. Receiving Jesus Christ into your life will guarantee your eternal destiny — a home in heaven.

Your decision to believe and receive the Lord Jesus Christ involves your total being — spirit, soul and body. When you receive Christ, you are inviting Him to be the Lord of your life, to cleanse you from all sin and to make you a new creature in Christ. When you invite Jesus into your life, you will begin to experience what He has created you for, all along. That God-shaped vacuum and void inside of you will be filled at last.

Just knowing about Christ intellectually or just having an emotional feeling about Jesus is not enough. Receiving Jesus requires an act of your will. In other words, by faith you choose to invite Jesus Christ into your life to be your Lord.

When you confess Jesus with your mouth and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, He will instantly enter your life and cause your spirit to be born again.

1. Do you believe that Jesus is Lord? _____

2. Do you believe God raised Him from the dead? _____

3. Would you like to invite Jesus Christ into your life to be your Lord and Savior? _____

If your answer to these three questions is yes, then make certain of your eternal destiny now by receiving Jesus Christ into your heart and into your life. To ask Jesus Christ to be your Savior, pray a simple prayer, like the one below, and mean it in your heart.

Dear God, I come to You in the name of Jesus. I need You. I know that I am a sinner in need of a Savior. I now turn to You, Jesus. I believe that You died for me and were raised from the dead by God. I believe that You are the Lord, and I now confess You as my Lord. Thank You that I am now born again. I am saved and am a part of Your family. Thank You, Lord.

K. GROUP EXERCISE

There may be people in the group who have questions. Take time to answer any questions those in your group might have.

Read through the Personal Application section as a group. Then, as a group, pray with those who desire to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord.

¹James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance Compact Edition with Dictionaries of Hebrew & Greek Words* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), "Greek Dictionary of the New Testament," p.10, #264, #266. Information contained in this explanation of sin is also based on Finis Jennings Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville, Georgia: Dake Bible Sales, 1961), "New Testament," p. 93, ref. v, column 4, and *Wuest Word Studies in Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1945), vol. 3, p. 95.

²Finis Jennings Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*, (Lawrenceville, Georgia: Dake Bible Sales, 1961), pp. 126,174, s.v. "salvation."