

3B HOW DOES ONE BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

(By Bill)

Since Biblical Christianity is not simply “another religion”, but the unique truth, one would expect the entrance into this relationship to be unique. It is. There is no ritual, or set of “magic words”, that causes it to happen. Because God seeks to have a relationship with us, similar to that in a marriage, He is the One Who initiates it. This is based on His love for us, which is not based on our goodness, so that we cannot earn that love. God proved His love for us by sending His Own Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for our sins by dying two thousand years ago. In the words of the apostle John:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” [John 3:16, The Bible (paraphrased King James Version)]

There are actually three basic steps in becoming a Christian; the first two are concepts which must be grasped, and the third is a covenant by which God’s gift of eternal life is received.

First, one must realize that he has failed to live as God expects him to live, and therefore he deserves God’s punishment. Jesus taught that we are expected to be as perfect as God Himself. In the words of the apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans,

“There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no, not one,” He concludes,
“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” [Romans 3:10-12, 23, The Bible (paraphrased KJV)]

This is a *realization*, not a “statement of faith”; that is, it must be a conclusion which one comes to by self-examination. This first step, the realization of our sinfulness before a Holy and righteous God, together with sorrow and repentance for it, may be a process that takes a lifetime or a few minutes, and it is depressing, but necessary. It might be termed “wrestling with God”. Without this first step, the second is meaningless.

The second step is the understanding that Jesus Christ, God’s unique and only Son, took the punishment, which we deserve, by dying on the cross. He, the only perfectly righteous man, who deserved no punishment, died, in our place, for our sins.

Paul continues to explain this in his letter to the Romans:

“But God showed his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” [Romans 5:8-10, The Bible (paraphrased KJV)]

These first two points, that we are sinful and condemned, and that Christ has made the payment for our sins, may be understood, but the application is *not automatic*. An act of the will is required. God has provided His Son as the payment for sin, and His approval and acceptance of that sacrifice has been proven by the fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how 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 Peter, then by the twelve: after that, he was seen by more than five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain until the present, but some have fallen asleep.” [I Corinthians 15:3-6, The Bible (paraphrased KJV)]

Paul has written here that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was prophesied hundreds of years before the event took place, and witnessed by over 500 people at once, as well as by the disciples – some of whom were still living at the writing of this letter.

This is important because the third step involves *faith*, which is a badly misunderstood concept in our time. “To believe” is another way of saying “to put faith in”, and it is not, as many suppose, “a leap in the dark.” Faith is “trusting in evidence.”

This, then, is the third point – the means by which this gift of everlasting life is appropriated – it is taken by faith; Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus: “For by grace you are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” [Ephesians 2:8-9, The Bible (paraphrased KJV)]

That this is appropriated “by grace” means that salvation is a gift from God, so there is nothing one can do to merit it.

In the third chapter of the book of John, we read that a religious leader inquired about spiritual things, and Jesus told him he had to be “born again”, or he would never enter the kingdom of God. We see the same term used in the first chapter, also. John says:

“But as many received him (Jesus), to them He gave the power to become the sons of God, that is, to those that believe on His name: which 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, The Bible (paraphrased KJV)]

The word “believe” here is the same as the word for faith. It is an active faith, not just an intellectual assent, and this passage indicates that to “believe” in Jesus is the same as to “receive” Him; and that the result is that one is “born...of God.”

This third step is a very personal matter, a transaction made between a person and God. By prayer, one acknowledges that he is a sinner, asks for the forgiveness provided on the basis of Christ’s death, and invites Jesus Christ to come and live in and through him. There is a supernatural element to this, because God’s Holy Spirit will come and inhabit the person making the request. That person is then spiritually “born again”.

After this transaction has been made, it is important to nurture the new spiritual life. It is good to seek out others who have had the same experience, meet with them regularly, and read The Bible and pray daily.

In summary,

Romans 3:10 “As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one’” (NIV)

Romans 3:26 “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (NIV)

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (NIV)

Romans 10:9-10 “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”