

Why Be A Christian?

We learned in the previous lesson that Christianity is a relationship between each of us and the Lord Jesus Christ. This relationship permeates our life and all that we do. Worship, work, school, play, all that we are and all that we do are to be done to the glory of God. Christianity is not a Sunday morning religion, it is a 24 hour per day religion based on the birth, life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

So we need to be unhappy, right? Wrong! Think about it. Christianity is wonderful. Christ came that we might have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:9-10 I am the door. If anyone enters in by me, he will be saved, and will go in and go out, and will find pasture. The thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.

Christ gives us something much better than a cell phone. Which would you rather have, a phone line to talk to the leaders of other countries like our president has or a phone line direct to the source of all power, to God the creator of the universe? The Holy Spirit that moves into our hearts when we become Christians doesn't just connect us to God, he translates our feeble prayers and limited thinking into what really needs to be said.

Romans 8:26-27 In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we don't know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which can't be uttered. He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.

Does this mean that it is easy to be a Christian. No, there is a war on, a war between good and evil. God will win, but sometimes God allows evil to prevail. We are promised trouble in this world.

John 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.NIV

But our light and momentary troubles are worth the long term reward for Christians as some of us grow old and feeble and others suffer and die for Christ. It's worth it.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17 Therefore we don't faint, but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory;

We are in a war zone, a war between good and evil.

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

We have an active enemy. The same enemy who introduced evil into the world by causing Adam and Eve to sin.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober and self-controlled. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

God's spirit dwelling in us gives us the power to overcome the evil one.

1 John 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.

God limits what Satan can do. Satan can tempt us, but he is not allowed to tempt us more than we can endure.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

God created a beautiful world with no pollution, no sin and no death. He placed our ancestors, Adam and Eve, in a garden with good fruit to eat and pleasant

work to do taking care of the garden. They even had access to the tree of life (immortality). But they wanted to be wise like God, so they chose to disobey God, to sin, and brought down the curse of death on all mankind.

Many years later, God told a man named Abraham to leave his homeland and take his family and go to a land he would show him. Abraham did as God said and was blessed with the gift of a son in his old age (100 years). When asked by God, Abraham was willing to offer his son to prove his devotion, but God provided a ram instead. Many years later God fulfilled his plan to redeem mankind by offering his son to die in our place.

God blessed Abraham and his descendants, the Israelites, but they were rebellious and chose to worship idols instead of God. He sent prophets who warned them to repent, but they refused to listen and so were defeated and killed or carried off to Babylon. Here is what one of their prophets said to them before they were carried off to Babylon.

Isaiah 59:1-3 Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it can't save; neither his ear heavy, that it can't hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness.

The sins of the Israelites kept their prayers from getting through to God. Today, our sins can do the same thing to our prayers. God loves us, but he is holy. Our sins are like smoke in his nostrils. God's justice and his holiness demand that he swat us like flies, but his love yearns to forgive us. He cares so much for us that he devised a plan to save us, a costly plan. He sent his son, Christ, to pay the penalty for our sins by dying for those who believe in him.

John 3:16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

Instead of implementing his plan instantaneously, God did it over thousands of years and gave his servants, the prophets, many predictions of what would happen in the future. These prophecies are scattered throughout the Old Testament. Christ's fulfilling the prophecies about him is one of the main

reasons to believe in him. Christianity is not an illogical faith, but rather one based on lots of good evidence not only from the Bible but from archeology and history and has been confirmed by many ancient documents.

God's plan to pay for our sins (our redemption) was a strange idea, a suffering servant who would be despised and rejected by mankind. When Christ came into this world, he was not born in a king's palace, but in a stable with a manger for a cradle. The Jewish people misunderstood the prophecies. They expected a messiah who would be a military leader and defeat all their enemies and make them the dominant nation in the world as they had been at the time of Solomon. Here is one of the most famous prophecies, written hundreds of years before Christ was born:

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely he has borne our sickness, and carried our suffering; yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Not only are these verses included in the Bible, but they have been confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls which include a copy of the whole book of Isaiah written many years before Christ was born. Christ preached that the kingdom of God was near, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and helped the poor. He spoke to the people in parables and only explained what the parables meant to his disciples, so to most of the people he seemed crazy. Just as Isaiah had prophesied, Christ was despised and rejected by men. He condemned the Pharisees for following their man-made rules and traditions, which made the Pharisees hate him. He offended all the powers that be in Judea at that time. They arrested him, arranged a kangaroo court and railroaded him to be crucified. When he was arrested all of his followers ran off. Even Peter, whom he had named the rock, denied him. The Roman governor, Pilate, tried to free him by having Jesus scourged (brutally beaten) to satisfy the Jews. Scourging would make the victims almost unrecognizable. But that wasn't enough to satisfy the mob. They threatened to complain to Caesar, so Pilate reluctantly gave in and had Jesus crucified. The Roman soldiers pierced the side of this suffering and cruelly beaten man, scourged till he was nearly unrecognizable; a man who was pierced for our transgressions and who bore our punishment; a man who was the Son of God. This is just one of many prophecies that Christ fulfilled, there isn't time to cover all of them here. For a detailed treatment of "Old Testament Prophecies

Fulfilled in Jesus Christ", see Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 165-202.

Another reason to believe in Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Either it's true or it's false. Consider the evidence. Christ's disciples ran off when he was arrested; a fearful Peter denied knowing him; later they were hiding in an upper room terrified by their fear of the Romans. But then a few days later, after they saw and spoke with the risen Christ, we see these same timid souls standing up to the government saying that we must obey God rather than men.

Acts 4:19-20 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, judge for yourselves, for we can't help telling the things which we saw and heard."

What would it take to take a bunch of trembling fearful men to suddenly become brave. A miracle! All but one of the apostles died as martyrs for the Christian faith, only John lived to reach old age. These men were in a position to know if the resurrection was faked. But they clearly believed it, believed strongly enough to suffer and die for their belief. People don't endure persecution and die for a lie. The resurrection is one of the strongest evidences for Christianity.

Christians not only believe in a creator, God, who gave his son, Jesus, to die for our sins; we believe in a final day of judgment where the good will be rewarded and the wicked punished. Paul told the pagan Athenians about God, who created the world and who has appointed a day of judgment so that everyone needs to repent. Note that he used the resurrection as his final proof.

Acts 17:30-31 The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked. But now he commands that all people everywhere should repent, because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained; of which he has given assurance to all men, in that he has raised him from the dead.

Even though we have committed bad sins, terrible sins, we can become children of God and escape the judgment. Peter told the very ones who had killed Christ that they could be forgiven of their sins, if they would "repent and be baptized". We all need to do this. Notice that we Gentiles are the ones "far off" about which Peter spoke.

Acts 2:38-39 Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far off, even as many as the Lord our God will call to himself'.

Once we have faith and become children of God, we need to remain faithful to him and to keep his commandments. To love each other and to spread the gospel. His commandment to love provides a way to tell real disciples from false ones.

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just like I have loved you; that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Peter and Paul and the other Christians we read about in the New Testament fulfilled Christ's parting command to preach and teach the gospel all over the world.

Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen.

Paul gives us a summary of the basic facts of the gospel we are to teach others in the following verses:

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Now I declare to you, brothers, the Good News which I preached to you, which also you received, in which you also stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold firmly the word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Our manual is the Bible. For more details on why we believe this please see Appendix B, Why Believe the Bible and Appendix D, Why A New Testament.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The Old Testament Scripture was written for our good too.

Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that through patience and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

SUMMARY

We have good reason to believe that Christ is the Son of God, that he lived, preached, was crucified, died, rose from the dead, gave his disciples the mission to make disciples of all men and he is coming again to judge the world. We believe that He has given us a manual for our salvation and for holy living called the Bible.

Hopefully after reading this you now understand the fundamental points of Christianity. FAQ 2 "Can I Be Saved?" will cover what Christ expects us to do and the wonderful benefits he has provided for us in more detail.

Where did this world come from?

Where am I going?

Why am I here?

Who am I?

How should I live?

What must I do to be saved?

Your answers determine the choices you make.

Your choices determine your life.

Belief in God is a choice.

Choose God!