

*What is
Christianity?*

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What is Christianity?

David Hocking

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Christianity is something more than just another religious system created by the social demands of a culture. Because there are so many counterfeits, we often find it hard to discover the truth. Many religious groups claim to be “Christian” but have no allegiance to the Bible’s basic teachings concerning Jesus Christ. Yet Christ is, in fact, the founder and central focus of all that Christianity is.

Perhaps you are seriously considering becoming a Christian, or have recently become one. This booklet will, I hope, help you understand what a Christian is and what a Christian should believe and do.

Even if you’ve been a Christian for some time, you may find a walk through the issues of this booklet extremely helpful. Here you can evaluate once again whether you are adhering to the truth about Christianity, or have instead come to accept a substitute or diluted message because of wrong teachings or lifestyles.

Common Misunderstandings

Let’s first identify common misunderstandings about Christianity, and examine them in the light of what the Bible teaches.

- **You are a Christian because your family is Christian.**

Many people believe they are Christians because their parents professed to be Christians. If your family belonged to a Christian church and took you to that church, so the assumption goes, then you also must be a Christian. But the Bible does not teach this at all.

In John 1:12-13 we are told clearly that no one is a Christian because of blood descent. God has no grandchildren! Each person must come to a point of personal commitment to the claims of Jesus Christ, regardless of what his or her parents believe.

- **You are a Christian because you go to church.**

Going to church is a good habit, but it doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you a mechanic! In some churches you will find little that teaches you about Jesus Christ because they don't teach the Bible as they once did. No matter what the brand name on the door, if the church you attend does not teach what the Bible says about Jesus Christ, you are likely to become more confused than ever. Such a church doesn't even deserve the name "Christian."

The Bible teaches that in the last days before Jesus Christ returns to earth, there will be a false church from which true believers must depart. In Revelation 18:4 a voice from heaven says, “*Come out of her, my people.*”

In an interesting picture given in Revelation 3:20, Jesus Christ is standing outside the door of a church, and invites men and women within that church to respond personally to him. This illustration should be enough to tell us that joining or attending a church is not enough to make you a Christian.

- **You are a Christian because you believe in God.**

Most people believe in God, though they may disagree about what He is like-whether He is personal or not-and about what He can do. Belief in God is commendable, but it does not make you a Christian.

The Bible tells us in James 2:19 that even demons believe in the one God-but they certainly are not Christians!

- **You are a Christian because you act like one.**

Another common misunderstanding is that Christianity is nothing more than doing good, trying to be the best person you can be. Again,

this is commendable, but it doesn't make you a Christian. Many non-Christians live "good" lives and stay away from evil practices.

The Bible tells Christians that God saved us "*...not by works of righteousness which we have done*" (Titus3:5), nor because of our keeping the Ten Commandments or any other set of rules (Romans 3:20 and 3:28).

If you are truly a Christian, you will live like one; but your lifestyle is not the reason you are a Christian.

- **You are a Christian because you avoid harmful habits.**

Some think a Christian is one who doesn't smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, take drugs, or chew tobacco. On that basis, I could prove that my dog is a Christian! Of course, it may benefit you (and my dog) to abstain from these habits, but doing so doesn't mean you are a Christian.

- **You are a Christian because you wear a cross around your neck, carry a Bible, or put Christian stickers on you car windows or bumper.**

It is socially acceptable to call yourself a Christian these days-to learn and use the Christian vocabulary, attend Christian events, read Christian books and listen to Christian

music. If you do so, you may assume therefore that you are a Christian. Maybe someone has even asked you to sign on the dotted line or repeat a few cleverly presented words. Perhaps you found it easy to believe-no price to pay, no cross to bear, no hardship to endure. It was just a matter of saying and doing the right things.

But listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21-23.

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”

The misunderstandings Jesus spoke against continue today. The deception, hypocrisy, and manipulation of Christian truth is incredible. People are led to believe that Christianity is nothing more than a religious system guaranteeing health, wealth, success, and personal happiness. It appears to be the “American dream,” asking little and promising much!

What Must Genuine Christians Believe?

Setting aside the misunderstandings, let's take a close look at what the Bible teaches all

Christians must believe in order to deserve the name.

- **Christians believe that all people are sinners and cannot save themselves.**

Here is a good place to begin. Forget trying to understand Christianity if you don't see why we need a Savior. Although people often seem offended at being called a sinner, this is the clear message of the Bible.

The apostle Paul writes in Roman 3:23, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

Paul adds in Romans 6:23, "*For the wages of sin is death.*" Simply put, we all sin and we all die as a consequence of our sin.

Those who do not admit their sin simply are not Christians. That's the clear message of I John 1:8, "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*"

Christians readily admit that they are sinners and need a Savior, and in I John 1:9 we see God's response to this honest admission: "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

No confession, no forgiveness!

Only recognition of our sinful condition prepares us to believe in God's remedy.

- **Christians believe that only Jesus Christ can save us from our sins and take us to heaven.**

While speaking to His disciples who would later be instrumental in spreading and establishing Christianity, Jesus said these words in John 14:6, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*"

Peter, a leader of these disciples, said these words about Jesus in Acts 4:12, "*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*"

Leave Jesus out, and Christianity ceases to be what the Bible teaches it is! There is no such thing as Christianity without Jesus Christ!

- **Christians believe Jesus is the promised Messiah of the Jews.**

The apostle John summarized his record of the miraculous things Jesus did in His earthly life by saying, "*These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name*" (John 20:31).

This word “Christ” is based on a Greek word meaning “anointed one.” This is also the meaning of the Hebrew word we know as “Messiah,” a person described in the Old Testament as the One chosen by God to bring salvation to His people. This Promised Messiah is the subject of many Old Testament passages, including Isaiah 59:20, which speaks of a coming “*Redeemer*”.

The first Christians were Jewish, just as Jesus Himself was. Christianity is deeply rooted and vitally connected to the Jewish faith and to the ancient promises of God to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. Both Jews and non-Jews may become Christians, with non-Jews (or “Gentiles”) being included as fulfillment of God’s words to Abraham in Genesis 12:3,

“And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

“*All the families of the earth*” refers to Gentiles. Abraham is thus the father of both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ. As we learn in Romans 4:16-25 and Galatians 3:6-9, these Gentiles-through faith in the Messiah-are included in the eternal blessings and benefits promised to the Jews who would believe.

Many Jewish people find it difficult to become Christians because of the terrible persecutions Jews have suffered in the past in the name of

Christianity. True Christians are deeply hurt by such atrocities and are ashamed of what has been done.

Attempts to blame the Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus have also led to great misunderstanding and resentment. The Bible states clearly that Jesus came into the world to die, and that God had a purpose in allowing all the human plans that led to Jesus' death (Luke 18:31-33; Acts 2:23). True Christians believe that Jesus died for the sins of all people, both Jews and Gentiles.

- **Christians believe Jesus Christ is both God and man, distinct from the Father in heaven, but divine in attributes and abilities.**

No issue is more controversial than this one! No belief of historic Christianity has been more debated or denied than the deity of Jesus Christ. How can He be both God and man at the same time?

The fact that He was a real man in history is rarely questioned anymore. Everyone seems to agree that He had human emotions and needs, that He ate, slept, talked, and lived like other men. His uniqueness was evident to all who knew Him. He was unlike other men. He performed miracles that no one else could, and consistently demonstrated unusual qualities that

most men rarely show even once in a lifetime. His critics were unable to find any real fault in His lifestyle, and no one could prove Him guilty of a single sin or wrongdoing.

So although we almost universally accept the faultless character of Jesus without difficulty, there is a problem we face in dealing with Him: He claimed to be the Son of God, and to have power and authority to forgive sins and to give eternal life to all who would believe in Him.

Was He, therefore, a liar? Or could He have been paranoid, struck with delusions of grandeur? Or could it be that the Bible writers lied about what He claimed and did? Are we confused by what the Bible says about Him? Are we interpreting or translating the Bible incorrectly? A key question, then, is this: Does the Bible really say that Jesus is God?

In John 1:1, Jesus is called “*...the Word,*” the revelation of God to men, and we are told in the same verse that “*...the Word was God.*”

In I John 5:20, Jesus is called “*...the true God and eternal life.*”

Paul says in Colossians 2:9, “*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*”

Jesus said in John 14:9, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father.*” In John 10:30 He said, “*I*

and My Father are one,” words which caused those who heard them to pick up stones to kill Him for blasphemy.

Can a person be a real Christian and not believe that Jesus is God? The Bible teaches that this is not possible. In I John 4:2-3 we read, *“Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.”* And we find these words in II John 9, *“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God.”*

The importance of such belief is clearly spelled out in Mark 2:7, when some Jewish scribes reasoned, *“Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”* If we expect our sins to be forgiven, we had better settle in our minds the identity of the One claiming to forgive us. Paul says in II Corinthians 5:19, *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.”* If Jesus is not God, then how can He forgive our sins today?

- **Christians believe Jesus Christ paid for their sins when He died on the cross.**

We read these words from Paul in Romans 5:8, *“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in*

that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In verse 9 he adds, we "...have now been justified by his blood." In I Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul gives a definition of the gospel which begins: "...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." In Ephesians 1:7, Paul says this about Christ: "*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*" And in Colossians 2:13, Paul reveals that because of what God did through Christ, we have been forgiven "...all trespasses."

The apostle Peter says that Jesus Christ "...bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness, by whose stripes you were healed" (I Peter 2:24). In I John 1:7, a passage about walking in the light of God, we read that "*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*"

Turning to the Old Testament, we find this prophecy concerning the Messiah in Isaiah 53:5-6:

"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Jesus did not die simply to show us the meaning of love, although His death certainly did that. He did not die as a martyr or merely as an example to us. Nor was He a victim of circumstances, surprised by the events that led to His crucifixion for He predicted both the fact and method of His death. **Jesus died to pay for our sins.**

He fulfilled what had been pictured through the centuries in every animal sacrifice the Jewish people offered for sin. Sin requires death as a penalty. An animal's death was used to picture substitutionary death, even though the animal's blood could never take away sin. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "*Behold! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29).

Peter declares:

"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

The death of Jesus Christ pays our penalty of death. *His* body substitutes for our own in incurring the payment for our sin. Jesus Christ took our place, dying for us. Our sins are forgiven because the penalty has been paid, and

we accept the work of Jesus as a sufficient sacrifice and substitution for the wrong we have done. To be a Christian, you must believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins.

- **Christians believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ascended to heaven.**

A dead savior will not do! The apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15:14, “*And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain.*” In verse 17 he adds, “*And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!*”

You must believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ to become a Christian. Paul gives us “*...the word of faith*” in Romans 10:9, “*That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*”

When Jesus rose from the dead, it was not just His spirit or influence that lived on. Rather, He had a real, physical body! Luke 24:39 records Jesus’ words on one occasion when He appeared to His disciples after His resurrection: “*Behold My hands and My feet that it is I Myself! Handle Me and see Me, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.*” He also ate food in their presence to prove His point (Luke 24:42-43).

The Bible tells us that people saw Jesus on earth for forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3), and then He ascended into heaven. Acts 1:9-11 records this event:

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’”

In I Corinthians 15:5-8, Paul lists people who saw Him after His resurrection including more than five hundred people on one occasion.

Jesus Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of our own physical resurrection when Jesus comes again. Christianity is much more than a set of rules to live by while you're on earth. Christianity tells you what will happen after you die, and speaks in detail about life after death.

- **Christians believe Jesus Christ is coming again.**

Though we do not know when, all true Christians believe Christ will come back to earth. Jesus Himself said to His disciples the

night before He died on the cross (John 14:3),
“I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

Paul reminds us in Titus 2:13, “*...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” Christianity is a message of hope-not whistling in the dark, but real hope, rooted in historical facts and in the promises of God.

Paul describes this hope:

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:16-17).

These seven statements are the basic facts which Christians believe. We might disagree on minor points (and we usually do!), but these seven essentials bind us together and clarify who is really a Christian and who is not.

Everything centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Without Him, Christianity does not exist. Genuine Christians speak of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, not a religious tradition or particular way of doing

things. We gather together regularly in local churches, and even when apart, we have spiritual unity at all times with all true Christians in every country. We call our churches by different names, and we tend to emphasize different things taught in the Bible, but in the final analysis our commitment to Jesus Christ makes us all one.

How Do You Become a Christian?

Becoming a Christian is really quite simple. In fact, many people are amazed at how simple it really is. Jesus taught that even a child could become a Christian. Some people try to make it difficult, others stumble over its simplicity.

How, then, do you become a Christian? As we answer this, we will also be answering a companion question: How can you *know* you are a Christian?

- **Admit that you are a sinner and that you cannot save yourself.**

In I John 1:9 we are told to “*confess our sins.*” This means agreeing with God that you are a sinner and need to be saved. Such a confession may seem unnecessary to you, but it is crucial:

“*He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy*” (Proverbs 28:13).

Jesus once told of a sinful man who came to the temple to pray, and made this simple statement: “*God be merciful to me a sinner!*” (Luke 18:13). “*This man,*” Jesus said, “*went down to his house justified.*” Jesus said also in Luke 5:32, “*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*”

It is humbling to admit that you are a sinner and deserve to be punished for what you have thought, said, or done, but such humility is needed. Pride keeps many people from making a commitment to Jesus Christ. The Bible urges us repeatedly to humble ourselves before God, and then promises that He will then lift us up.

- **Believe what the Bible says about Jesus Christ.**

Review again what we said about the things Christians must believe. These beliefs center on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Do you believe He is the promised Messiah, both God and man, and your only Savior from sin? Do you believe He paid for your sins when He died on the cross? Do you believe He rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and will one day come again?

The Bible proclaims all of this. Your faith must be in what the Bible says about Jesus Christ, not in what your personal feelings might be, or in

how well you think you can perform as a Christian. In Ephesians 2:8-9 we read, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*

Paul declares in Romans 10:17, *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* In Acts 16:31, a man longing urgently for salvation was told by Paul and Silas, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”*

In Hebrews 11:6 we are told, *“Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*

It is not your faith that saves you; Jesus Christ saves you! Faith is merely the channel by which we express confidence in what the Bible says about Jesus Christ. Greater faith does not change what has already happened. Christianity is true whether we believe it or not. We can't make it any truer by believing it. But if we do believe it, we can enjoy its truth forever.

- **Commit your life and future to Jesus Christ.**

No issue troubles people more than yielding control of their lives to Jesus Christ. One can be exposed to Christian faith and practice all his

life, and yet fail to make a personal commitment to Jesus and taste the abundant life He offers. Being around food all day without taking a bite of it will not satisfy your hunger! You may intellectually agree with the facts of the Gospel and appreciate all that Christians believe about Christ, but have you committed your life and future to him?

This is not the same as joining a church or being baptized, as important as those matters may be.

The Bible uses many different words to describe this personal commitment to Jesus Christ

“To as many as *received* Him”-John 1:12

“*Repent* therefore and be converted” -Acts 3:19

“The Lord opened her heart to *heed* the things spoken by Paul”-Acts 16:14

“*Believe* on the Lord Jesus”-Acts 16:31

“Some of them were *persuaded*”-Acts 17:4

“You *obeyed* from the heart”-Romans 6:17

“If you *confess* with your mouth”-Romans 10:9

“By grace you have been saved through *faith*”-Ephesians 2:8

“You *turned* to God”-I Thessalonians 1:9

“I have *committed* to Him”-II Timothy 1:12

“*Enter* that rest”-Hebrews 4:11

“Let us *draw near* with a true heart”-Heb.10:22

“You have *tasted* that the Lord is gracious”-I Peter 2:3

“If anyone **hears** My voice and *opens* the door”-
Revelation 3:20

The important issue in all these passages is that the individual makes the commitment; it is not made for him.

Have you made this commitment? If not, why not stop reading at this point, and in the privacy of your own heart, between you and God, commit your life and future to Jesus Christ! Perhaps a simple prayer like this could guide you:

Lord, I confess that I am a sinner and cannot save myself. I believe that Jesus Christ is both God and man and that He paid for all my sins when He died on the cross. I believe He rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and will one day come back again. I now commit my life to Jesus Christ, trusting Him alone as my Savior. Thank you so much for loving me and saving me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

What Happens When You Become a Christian?

What happens when you become a Christian?

Will you hear bells and thunder, and see flashes of lightning in the sky? Normally, no! You might sense feelings of peace and joy and a new

beginning, but these feelings are not the barometer of salvation and new life in Christ.

There are, however, certain facts that take place the moment you commit yourself to Christ, regardless of how you feel, or whether or not you are aware of them.

- **You are forgiven of all your sins!**

Because of this faith-response to Jesus Christ, as we read in Ephesians 1:7, “*...we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*”

Our forgiveness is made clear also in I John 1:9, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” This forgiveness is based on the character of God, and not on our own worthiness or performance. Notice that the forgiveness we receive results in complete cleansing. What good news that is!

Because Jesus paid for our sins when He died on the cross, God is able to forgive us. Forgiveness does not mean God overlooks our sin or simply ignores it. God’s holy and righteous character demands payment—the penalty of sin is death. But Jesus died in our place, and being both God and man, His death was a sufficient substitution for every one of us. God is just, as well as forgiving.

- **You are declared righteous before God!**

When you become a Christian, you are not yet *made* righteous-this will not take place until Jesus comes again-but rather you are *declared* righteous because of your faith in what Jesus has already done for you. This means God looks at you now through the work of His Son Jesus Christ. He sees and declares you to be perfect. You have been justified. There are no charges against you, “*...no condemnation*” (Romans 8:1).

In Romans 3:24, we see the reason for this: We are “*...justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*” We are justified before God on the basis of faith, not on the basis of our works (Romans 3:28; 4:1-5). That’s how Abraham was justified as well.

In Romans 5:1, Paul says, “*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” He adds in verse 9, “*Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.*”

Being justified before God means that God has nothing against you anymore. His wrath against sin has been cared for by the death of Jesus Christ, and your faith in Jesus has removed the guilt and condemnation. What a blessing!

- **You are a child of God and a new creation!**

Not everyone is a child of God, in spite of what many people think. The Bible puts all people into two camps: children of God and children of the devil (I John 3:10). You become a member of God's family when you receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. This is made clear in John 1:12, "*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.*"

All of us appreciate having a fresh start in life. According to II Corinthians 5:17, this new beginning happens when you become a Christian: "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*" Likewise in Ephesians 4:24 we read of our "*...new man, created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness.*"

You are different now that you are a Christian, and yet you are still the same person. According to the Bible, you have undergone a spiritual awakening, a spiritual birth. You have been born again-a new start! Jesus said, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3), and then added, "*You must be born again*" (3:7). No options here! **True Christians have been born again.** Paul in

Titus 3:5 calls it “*...the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*” It is a spiritual birth caused by the Holy Spirit of God.

- **You have received the Holy Spirit into your life!**

This may sound strange to you, because you cannot actually see it happen, but when you become a Christian, the Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in your body. Paul writes in I Corinthians 6:19, “*Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*”

He adds in Romans 8:9, “*If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*” Obviously, it’s pretty important to have the Holy Spirit in you.

The Holy Spirit is an endless resource for Christians to rely on. He will help you overcome sinful habits and practices (Galatians 5:16), and produce wonderful attitudes and experiences in you (Galatians 5:22-23). At times, you will feel the struggle between the Holy Spirit within you and your selfish nature and impulses (Galatians 5:17). Don’t panic when this happens. It is a good sign that you have become a Christian. Realize that a spiritual battle will often be fought in your heart between selfish desires and spiritual priorities and goals.

As we obey what the Bible teaches on these matters and rely on the Holy Spirit's power and control, we will triumph over sin and win great freedom.

What about Feelings?

Some days you will not "feel" like a Christian; that doesn't mean you aren't one. Did you put your faith in what the Bible teaches concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Then you are saved, no matter **how** you feel.

In I John 5:9-13, we learn about assurance—about *knowing for sure* that we are Christians and have eternal life. This assurance is based on "*the witness of God which He has testified of His Son*" (5:9). This testimony is found in the Bible, which is God's word. We can "*know*" we have eternal life if we rely upon the Bible (5:13).

You may find it helpful to memorize a few of these verses in I John 5, especially 11-13. They may come in handy when you start to doubt what has happened to you. Remember, the devil's tactics include casting doubts in your mind about your faith in Jesus Christ.

How to Get Started Right

All babies need to grow—and that includes spiritual babies! Here are a few things you can

start doing to grow in your understanding and maturity as a Christian.

- **Be baptized in water as a public testimony of your faith.**

This is not an option. All believers are to be baptized. Jesus commanded us to do so (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16), and so did His apostles (Acts 2:38).

Water baptism is a public testimony. Peter calls it “*...the answer of a good conscience toward God*” (I Peter 3:21). It pictures death, burial, and resurrection (according to Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12), and announces to those who witness it that we have believed in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for our salvation.

When people are baptized in water, the water is like a coffin into which the individual is placed. It pictures our death to sin and to our former sinful lifestyle. When we come up out of the water, it is a picture of being resurrected to new life in Christ. Baptism is a beautiful and moving experience, and will be a special blessing and encouragement to you. Most Bible-believing and Bible-teaching churches will be happy to baptize you on your profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

- **Read a portion of the Bible each day.**

The Bible is like food. You need it to grow. We are told in I Peter 2:2, "*As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.*"

Reading Psalm 119 will help you see many wonderful things about the Bible and what it will mean to your life, such as the encouraging statement in verse 105: "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*" The Bible will guide you and help you make right decisions.

You may have trouble understanding parts of the Bible. This is only natural for those just beginning their Christian lives. But you will find most of it clear and easy to read, though the rich depth in every part of it will draw you back to reread these exciting truths again and again.

I suggest that you start your Bible reading with the New Testament. The first four books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) describe the life of Jesus from His birth through His resurrection. The fifth book (Acts) begins with Jesus' ascension into heaven, and tells us how the church got started, and how it handled the problems it faced in the early days.

Many of the rest of the books are letters written by the apostles to individuals or to specific churches. Read them as they were intended-

letters from leaders about the nature, meaning, and lifestyle of Christianity.

The last book (Revelation) will fascinate you with its predictions about the future, though it usually is not as easy to understand without help as the other New Testament books.

- **Learn to pray to God about everything.**

Prayer is simply talking to God, giving Him thanks for all He has done, and for all that He is (the Bible will help you on this point).

Prayer is asking God to meet your needs, and to help you overcome temptation and sinful habits. Prayer is also a wonderful way to help others. Pray for your friends. Pray for your family. Pray for the pastors and missionaries who teach us the Bible and help us grow in faith.

The Bible tells us that we “*...always ought to pray and not lose heart*” (Luke 18:1).

The Bible reveals God’s will, so studying the Bible will also help you pray effectively.

- **Develop friendships with other Christians.**

Jesus commands His followers to love one another (John 13:34). Christians are all in the

same family as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, and we are to treat each other with love, respect, kindness, patience, humility, forgiveness, and more. Of course, we all need God's help to be what we should be for each other.

In Hebrews 10:24-25 we read this:

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

This will give you a start in the right direction. Pray about it, and examine everything in light of what the Bible teaches.

And one final word.....

Welcome to the family of God!