

## HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

Has it been awhile since you've been to church? Are you tuning in to the service through this streaming medium because you are used to going to church and this is the next best thing? Are you tuning in because you are bored and it is something to do besides watch a movie, Jeopardy reruns or playing another game? On a more serious note, the Coronavirus has brought the reality of the brevity and fragility of life to a stark reality. I, like many of you, personally know someone who has died from Covid-19. And I know many others who have contracted and come near death through this outbreak.

Therefore, while you are contemplating death, let's talk about what happens afterwards. In other words, if this day you were to die, do you have the assurance that it is well between you and God? Even as I say these words, there may be someone saying, how can there be a God who allows such evil as Coronavirus in the world? I will answer this with a question. Do you believe that since there is evil, there must be good? If you answer, "Yes, there is good." Then I must ask you another question. Who or what determines good? There is so much you and I would agree on; for instance, lying is wrong; stealing is wrong; murder is wrong, etc. These common values must have come from somewhere. Many speak of "my truth" as though what you may think is right or wrong is not what I may think is right or wrong. Yet, that still doesn't explain why most anyone would agree with the Ten Commandments as the basic standard of right or wrong. The Author of those Ten Commandments is the God of the Bible. And according to this Bible, God sent His only begotten Son, who was not only the Son of God, but also God, the Son into the world. Hebrews 1:3: "Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person...." And although Christ worked miracle after miracle, the reason He came was to die for our sins. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus from the dead is full of empirical evidence through eyewitnesses, history, archaeology, millions of followers who attest to having had a personal experience with the risen Lord, and of course, the proven veracity of the Scriptures by fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and the records of the apostles. Again, some are wrestling with another question: "Okay, let's say there is a God. Well then, I am mad at Him because if He is big enough and powerful enough to stop this suffering, then why doesn't He?" Will it suffice to say, if there is a God whom you say is "big enough and powerful enough" for you to be mad at for not stopping suffering, then can you accept this fact--that there is indeed a God big enough and powerful to have good reasons why He hasn't stopped the suffering that you have not yet thought about? You are not the first to ask these questions.

Here's what the Bible teaches. Although God is big enough and powerful enough to keep us from evil, He is also the God who declares repeatedly in the Scriptures that He loves us. I may not be able to explain why you or I suffer, but we know beyond doubt that God loves us. And He loved us so much that He entered into this world and was tempted in like manner as we are tempted, yet He did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). Dr. Tim Keller put it like this: "God loves us so much that some day He will end all our suffering, without ending us."

Today would be a great day to move beyond being a spectator and become a participator in the greatest life worth living and the only life that truthfully can be called eternal life. You see, Christianity is not real until it's personal. The Gospel means "good news." First, I need to share with you the bad news:

#### 1. TO DIE WITHOUT CHRIST IS TO BE SEPARATED FOR ETERNITY FROM GOD AND ALL THAT IS GOOD.

Here is a proven fact: 100 out of 100 people are going to die. It's just a matter of when. Hebrews 9:27: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." It could be the Coronavirus that takes you out or it could be cancer, a heart attack, Lou Gehrig's Disease, a plane crash, a car wreck or next season's flu. Death is coming. Death is coming to you. You were born with a nature prone to sin. Isaiah 53:6a: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way...." Romans 3:12b: "...there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Isaiah 59:2: "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that he will not hear." Without a personal encounter with Christ through what Jesus called the new birth, our doom is sealed. Revelation 20:15: "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Revelation 21:8: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." In this life, in God's merciful timing, there is hope. If a person dies without Christ, you have entered a state of utter and complete hopelessness (Luke 16:22-26). Life is uncertain. Proverbs 27:1: "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." James 4:14: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." How long will one who dies be separated from God and all that is good? Allow me to let Scripture answer that question. Revelation 14:11: "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night...." Luke 16:26: "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence."

#### 2. JESUS CHRIST LOVES YOU AND HAS PROVIDED SALVATION FROM A HOPELESS FUTURE IN THIS LIFE AND ETERNAL BLISS BEYOND THIS LIFE.

Jesus said in John 3:6, 7, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Many believe that Christianity is attained by something we do. Titus 3:5a says, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us...." Ephesians 2:8, 9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Our Lord explained how the new birth takes place in John 3:14-16. In Numbers 21, the Bible records that the people of Israel were dying from snake poison. Moses was commanded to place a serpent of brass upon a pole and whoever would look to the serpent and trust God in simple belief, would be saved. So Jesus was illustrating that He must be lifted up on the cross and there on that cross take the punishment for our sins. If we look to Him in sorrow for our sins with the faith of a child, we will be saved. Isaiah 45:22: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."

### 3. TO ACCEPT IN REPENTANCE AND FAITH CHRIST AND HIS FINISHED WORK (DEATH, BURIAL AND REUSRRECTION), YOU HAVE THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE STARTING RIGHT NOW!

II Corinthians 5:21: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Being born again, saved or converted, however you would biblically frame it, means that you accept 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" (I Corinthians 15:3b, 4). The Apostle Peter said in Acts 3:19a, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...." Repentance means you have turned from your sins and your helplessness to save yourself. Repentance is turning from the charms of this world, and faith is turning toward our Savior as the only way, truth and life (John 14:6). Romans 4:5: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

You could pray this prayer (if you mean it) or something similar to this, "Dear Lord, I know that I'm a sinner. I am sorry for my sins. I believe that You, Lord Jesus, died in my place on the cross and that You shed Your precious blood for my sins. I accept Your finished work. I give myself to You without reservation, wholly and completely. Save me. I am trusting You, dear Lord to give me the new birth and eternal life. In Jesus name, Amen."

Here's the promise: Romans 10:9, 10, 13, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." John 6:37: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." John 10:28: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

-Pastor Pope-