

Being a Christian

I Grace (“free gift”) – *God’s gift not our works*

Why should God accept us into heaven?

- The wrong answer: “What I have done”

And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” *Mark 7.20-23*

You can’t cure the measles by putting Band-Aids on the red spots. A systemic disease needs a systemic treatment.

- The right answer: “What Christ has done”

For by **grace** you have been **saved** through **faith**; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. *Ephesians 2.8-10*

Salvation is God’s free gift to us, but we *receive* that gift through faith.

See also James 2.14ff on the right relationship between *faith* and *works*

II Repentance

“The kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news.” *Mark 1.15*

To repent means much more than simply “feeling sorry.” The Greek word we translate as “repent” literally means to “turn around.” As Jesus says to the woman caught in adultery: “go, and do not sin again.” *John 8.1-11*

True repentance consists of several actions or steps:

- Feel sorry (conviction of sin)
- Acknowledge that you have sinned
- Take responsibility (don’t blame it on someone else)
- Ask forgiveness (both of God and person offended)
- Make amends (correct the error if possible)
- Commit never to do it again (start a new life)

III Faith

“The kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe....” *Mark 1.15*

To “have faith” or “believe” in the Biblical sense is better translated by the English word “trust.”

Charles **Blondin** was the greatest stuntman of his age. In 1859 he became the first person ever to cross Niagara Falls on a tightrope. He made that walk many times, often with some gimmick or other to make it interesting. Once, for example, he carried a stove on his back and cooked an omelet over the middle of the falls.

The story is told that once a news reporter was singing his praises, telling him that he was the greatest stuntman of all time and asking him what he would do next. Well, Blondin told him, he thought that he would next wheel someone across the falls in a wheelbarrow. Blondin then asked the reporter if he thought he could do it. He said, “Of course!” Well, said Blondin, then why don’t you be the one in the wheelbarrow.

That’s the difference between “believing” in an intellectual sense and the kind of belief that puts one’s life on the line.

Jesus gives many examples of how we are to bet our whole life on him such as:

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” *Matthew 13:44*

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” *Matthew 13:45-46*

IV Salvation vs. Sanctification

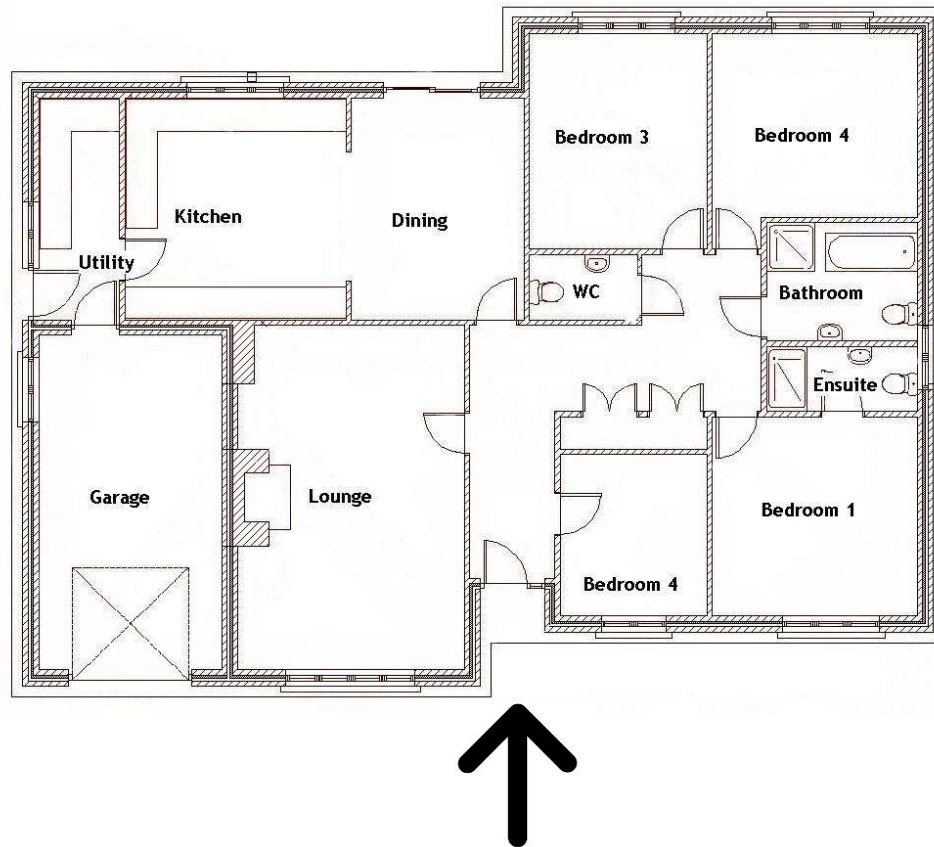
To become a Christian the Bible tells us that we must repent and believe—that is, we must turn from our sinful past and trust in the Lord Jesus—accepting what he has done for us on the cross.

Having done that, we can say we have been “saved” or “born again” (John 3.1-21). But salvation is just the beginning, or at least we can say it is a state of being—a lifestyle—rather than a goal line that is crossed once only to be forgotten.

St. Paul urges us to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” *Philippians 2.12*. To understand this, it is helpful to differentiate between **salvation** and **sanctification**.

Perhaps, if we think of ourselves like a house, the distinction is similar to “moving in day” versus “cleaning, renovating and redecorating.” You become a Christian once, but afterward are constantly maintaining fixing and improving.

Another way to look at the process is to consider the time we accept the Lord into our hearts (houses) and are given the Holy Spirit like inviting God into the foyer of your house. There then is a long (and sometimes painful) process of giving over each room in the house to his Lordship—things like one’s finances, recreation, sexuality, job and relationships.



Holy Spirit

A Christian truly has never “arrived” until he hears those words from the Lord: “Well done, good and faithful servant.... Enter into the joy of your master.” *Matthew 25:21*