

WHAT FOLLOWS BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

On becoming a Christian a person becomes a new creation, and embarks on a new life in which there is constant spiritual growth.

The Process of Salvation

The beginning of the salvation process is initiated by God when He puts a desire in a person's heart that leads to a search for truth. **"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."** *John 6:44-45.*

By the Holy Spirit the person is then directed to the word of salvation that engenders repentance, and a decision to adopt a new life. Peter stresses the importance of the word in the saving process. **"...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever."** 1 Peter 1:23.

After being prepared, God puts a measure of His faith in our hearts to fully receive and believe in our eternal salvation. **"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."** Eph 2:8-9.

Having believed, the salvation process is completed by the person confessing with his mouth his agreement to the truth of the word. **"But what does it say?" The word [the word of salvation] is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 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. FOR WITH THE HEART ONE BELIEVES UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND WITH THE MOUTH CONFESSION IS MADE UNTO SALVATION. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."** Rom 10:8-11.

Salvation Beliefs

The following are the basic beliefs attested to in a confession of salvation. Getting the words right or the depth of our understanding is not what justifies us before God, but what we believe in our hearts.

- That Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God.
- That He came in the flesh to represent mankind before God.
- That He, as the representative of mankind, bore the punishment for our sins by being put to death on the cross.
- Because He was righteous before God His Father, God raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His own right hand in heaven.
- God accepts the confession of all those who believe that their sins have been forgiven and that they are eternally righteous, and are eternally saved.
- Included in our confession of salvation, there should be a commitment to make Jesus Christ the Lord of our hearts and lives.
- To demonstrate their cleansing from all sin, and their passing from one life to another, those who have believed are baptised as a witness before all creation.

The result of their obedience to the process of salvation is that they are new-born Christians, part of the family of God, baptised into God the Father, Jesus Christ their Lord, and the indwelling Holy Spirit is their guide and teacher. They are accepted as children of God.

We Must be Born Again--We Must Begin a New Life

Jesus said that in the process of salvation, we had to be born again, not of flesh, but by the Holy Spirit. In reply to Nicodemus' question about being born again, **"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?'"** Jesus answered, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'**" John 3:3-8.

Born of the Water of the Word

Jesus said, **"unless one is born of water"**-- water is used as a symbol of the word, as illustrated in the following readings.

"...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God." 1 Peter 1:23.

"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you..." John 15:3.

"...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word..." Eph 5:25-26.

Born of the Spirit

The word leads us to the knowledge of salvation and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. At the very point of our making our confession, the Holy Spirit enters our own spirits, revitalizing them so that we can understand the things of God, to communicate with Him in prayer, and be nurtured by the Holy Spirit into maturity.

"But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:4-7.

Our spirits having been regenerated, we are now able to understand all of the spiritual blessings God has procured for us through the cross of Jesus. **"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God."** 1 Cor 2:12.

We are New Creations

We are now born as new creations, not created by the flesh, but by the Spirit. **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."** 2 Cor 5:17. As new creations born of the Spirit, and made holy and righteous by the cross of Jesus.

We are Children of God

We are now accepted by God and nurtured by Him as His children. **"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."** 1 Jn 3:1.

This reading presents a responsibility that follows salvation – to purify ourselves **“just as He is pure.** As children of God, we should allow the Holy Spirit to embark us and direct us on a path of holiness, **“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”** 2 Cor 7:1.

We Have to Walk as Children of God by Faith

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who 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.

This reading does not say that we have automatically become children of God, but that we have been given the right, or authority to become children of God. It is our right to lay claim to be children of God, and to walk in the light of being children of God. By faith we can enter into a relationship with God that sees Him as our Father, and receives from Him all the blessings of His fatherhood. Because He has given us the right to become His children, we can be assured that it is His pleasure to welcome us as His beloved children, and for us to walk in His blessings.

We start Our Spiritual Walk as Babies

Although we have been saved and our spirits enlivened, we at that point are spiritual children. In fact Peter calls us spiritual ‘newborn babes. **“...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”** 1 Peter 2:2-3. We are to grow up into the likeness of our head—Jesus Christ. **“but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ...”** Eph 4:15.

Spiritual Children Must Grow Up to Maturity

Before we can transmit the light of the glory of the indwelling Christ, we must grow up spiritually. Unfortunately, many new Christians remain in their state of spiritual infancy for the rest of their lives. Spiritually, they do not grow at all.

Peter tells us of one important thing we need if we are to grow spiritually. **“...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow.”** We must DESIRE the milk of the word. Receiving the word, through reading the bible, by participating in spiritual studies, by listening to spiritual teaching, or reading the works of anointed authors—all of these things enable us to grow in the knowledge of Christ, and partake of His indwelling life. But we must PARTICIPATE—TO PUT IN—to earnestly desire to receive truth. When we were saved and were filled with the Spirit, He desired us to receive as a gift from Him, **“the love of the truth”**—a gift that we could receive or reject. **“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”** 2 Thess 2:9-10.

The love of the truth inspires us to move on, not going over and over the same baby foods. Paul says that we should desire solid food, or mature teaching. It is this point that he emphasises in his letter to the Hebrews.

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that

is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

Heb 5:12-14. He gave the same warning to the Corinthians:

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal." 1 Cor 3:1-2 "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." Heb 6:1-3. Paul calls these things baby food.

Hold Fast to the Implanted Word

Having been taught, we must hold fast to the implanted word.

"Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain." Phil 2:14-16.

Holding fast to the implanted word is the essence of Jesus' teaching in the parable of the sower. The parable depicts four types of hearers. All had received the word.

"Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"" Matt 13:3-9

- They who received the word as seed scattered by the wayside are those who don't 'put in,' and concentrate when hearing it, and so don't understand it. The devil then snatches it away before it can sink in.
- They who received the word as seed scattered on stony places, are those who have no spiritual depth. They receive the word with the pleasure of receiving a new spiritual truth, but they do not 'hold fast to the word of life.' Jesus said that such people had no depth of truth within themselves as an anchor to cling to, and in the time of persecution they fall away. We hold the truth to ourselves by thinking and meditating on it until it stays in our hearts.
- They who received the word as if it was scattered among thorns, are they who receive the word as an implanted truth, but it has to compete with the cares, riches, and pleasures of the world, and before it can take root in their hearts, it is smothered and eventually disappears.
- They who received the word as seed scattered on fertile ground, are they who have open and earnest hearts, ready to hear and retain the word of truth. Consequently it bears much fruit in their spiritual growth and in their ministry to others.

The Importance of Our Manner of Hearing

After delivering the parable of the sower, Jesus went on to warn us that it depends on how we hear, as to how much truth we retain. If our overall attitude is not one of loving truth, and setting our hearts towards receiving and retaining truth, then the word of truth is often lost before it has a chance of settling in our hearts.

"For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light. Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him." Luke 8:17-18.

WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE FOR BECOMING CHRISTIANS?

We were created in Christ Jesus for Good Works

Receiving salvation and inheriting eternal life is of prime importance. But from the readings that we have already studied, these blessings are just the starting point. We are told that we should grow up into Christ, purify ourselves, and to engage in good works that God has prepared for us beforehand.

We were created and saved by God so that we might perform works He has prepared and set before us. **“For by grace you have been saved through faith...For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”** In God’s eyes our salvation should naturally result in doing good works that bear lasting fruit for the benefit of mankind. How else can the kingdom of the Lord be established on the earth unless we are faithful in doing the works He prompts us to do by His indwelling Spirit.

The Agreement of the Scriptures

The Scriptures are consistent in emphasising the necessity of being zealous in doing the Lord’s works.

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” Titus 2:11-14

“This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.” Titus 3:8

“Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” 1 Tim 6:18-19.

“And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.” Titus 3:14.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Tim 3:16-17.

“Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.” Titus 2:6-8.

Jesus is our Example

Jesus’ whole ministry provides us with a model of obedience in His doing the works His Father had prepared beforehand for Him to walk in them,

“Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?” John 10:32.

“Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.” John 4:34-35.

“But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish -- the very works that I do -- bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.” John 5:36.

The Primary Work of Jesus was to Lay Down His Life for Mankind

Jesus knew before the foundation of the world that His destiny was to be the Saviour of mankind by becoming an atoning sacrifice on the cross. Knowing all that confronted Him, He was perfectly obedient to God's will. **“when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem...”** Luke 9:51-52.

Jesus made it clear that it was by His own volition that he laid down His life. **“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”** John 10:17-18.

He steadfastly resisted all efforts to dissuade Him, saying to Peter, **“Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?”** John 18:11. And in the agony of Gethsemane, He again bowed to the will of the Father. **“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.”** John 12:27-28.

Jesus was determined to fully accomplish His Father's purpose for Him on earth. Knowing that all was accomplished perfectly and completely, His last words on the cross were, **“It is finished.”**

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, “I thirst!” Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.” John 19:28-30. It was a perfect work done in perfect obedience.

We are to follow Jesus' Example of Good Works

There are many Scriptural entreaties and warnings for us to meet our commitment to obedience in doing the works God has prepared and set before us. James warned, **“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself [even the faith for salvation] , if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. [pointing to the fact that he is warning Christians]. You do well. Even the demons believe -- and tremble! ...“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?...For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” James 2:14-20.& 26.**

At first this may appear to suggest that James is saying that we are saved by works. But that would be a denial of the very fundamental principle of our salvation. **“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.”** Eph 2:8-9. This key bible reading points out that we are saved by faith, but faith requires an action in response. After believing the word of salvation by faith, the action of confessing with our mouths should follow. Any belief by faith requires a confirming action. **Our Christian faith in general, without accompanying works, is dead.** We are not saved by good works but we are saved for good works.

Everyone can state a belief that Jesus Christ was the Son of God who came to the earth to procure our salvation. James stated that, **“Even the demons believe -- and tremble!”** We can make a confession with their mouths that we are saved by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and that we now wish to make Him Lord of our lives. But what evidence is there that our confession is real, or that our faith is real, or that we truly accept Jesus Christ as LORD, unless all is followed by confirming works. When we are genuinely saved, we are filled with the Spirit, and have the life of the Lord implanted within us. If we were obedient to our confession of Jesus Christ as Lord in us, it would be impossible for us to turn out backs on the works He was prompting us to do—to minister to those in need. Notice that works listed by James and Jesus are not great ministerial works, but the meeting the everyday needs of people that confront us, even to the basic hospitality of giving drink to the thirsty and food to the hungry. Works are the supreme test of our faith and our confession. **IT IS NOT THAT WE ARE SAVED BY WORKS, BUT THAT OUR SALVATION IS TESTED AND PROVED BY OUR WORKS.**

In doing good works through Christ’s indwelling presence in us, it is God’s purpose that the light of His glory in us should shine forth in the darkness of the world. In Christ being glorified through us, God the Father is also glorified in heaven. Jesus said, **“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”** Matt 5:14-16.

It is Possible for us to do Greater Works

Jesus promised that after receiving the Holy Spirit as at Pentecost, we should be able to do greater works. **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father [to send the Holy Spirit].”** John 14:12. This does not mean greater in power, but greater in scope, as in Peter’s address at Pentecost that was followed by about three thousand conversions.

Obedience to Christ’s Commandments

It is required of us that we not only know the word, but keep, or be obedient to what the word teaches us.

“But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” 1 John 2:5-6.

“But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” Matt 19:17.

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. John 14:15-16.

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” John 14:21.

As Christians we are kept by the power of God. Jesus presented this graphic parable to illustrate the difference that obedience or disobedience makes to our spiritual walk.

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” Matt 7:24.

The Work of Obedience to Love One Another

Every aspect of the law is fulfilled in the one command—to love one another. This is the foundation of all works for the Lord, the proof that they are genuine. Paul said, **“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”** 1 Cor 13:3.

Jesus said that love was proof of our discipleship. **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** John 13:34-35. If we genuinely love one another, how could we possibly turn our backs on someone in need?

FINAL WARNING

“And we desire that each one of you show the same DILIGENCE to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you DO NOT BECOME SLUGGISH...” Heb 6:11.