

# How Do I Become A Christian?

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*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

*John 3:16*

John 3:16 is probably the best known Bible verse in the whole world. It contains the Christian Gospel in a nutshell, God’s saving work for sinners. Its message is clear: some people are perishing, but God saves from death the people of the world who trust His Son for life. Here, indeed, is the way to heaven made plain for sinners. Let us take a closer look.

## ***SOME PEOPLE ARE PERISHING***

The Bible views us in terms of our relationship with God. Human beings have “life” only through God and they enjoy it only when they live in the presence of God. Therefore, they perish when they are separated from God. This is because:

### **We are creatures, totally dependent on God, our Creator.**

God alone sustains us and keeps body and soul together. In Adam, we were created true persons, self-conscious, free, responsible before God, and answerable to Him.

*“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”*

*[God is not] “worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He gives to*

*all life, and breath, and all things...For in Him we live, and move, and have our being...”*  
*(Gen. 1:27; Acts 17:25,28)*

### **We refuse to acknowledge our dependency on God.**

Adam and Eve thought they could get along without God. As the “parents” of human kind they rejected the Creator and plunged themselves and all the rest of us into a sinful condition of prideful rebellion against God. True to His Word, God punished sin by separating Adam and us from Himself. Thus, our lives are spoiled. We sons and daughters of Adam no longer really live. We merely exist in what could be called a kind of living death. We have forfeited and lost life with God, that is, the “eternal life” referred to in John 3:16.

*“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’*

*“Therefore... through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...”*  
*(Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 5:12)*

### **We are fallen.**

We are *totally unable* to help ourselves—that is, to get ourselves back into fellowship with God—because sin and death pervade every aspect of our beings. We are not even true men, whole and free, as God intended us to be. We are *alienated* from ourselves, from other men, and, most importantly, from God. Every relationship is perverted. All our faculties are deadened, rendered useless as instruments by which we might please God and be restored to His favor and fellowship. We are *lawbreakers*, condemned to perish in our sins, incapable in our own strength of fulfilling the law. We are *slaves*, helplessly mired in the muck of our sinful natures.

*“Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools...”* (Rom. 1:21-22)

## ***SALVATION FROM PERISHING IS BY WAY OF FAITH***

John 3:16 clearly teaches that those who are saved from perishing are those who “believe on” the Son of God. The Bible is very, very clear on this point: *we are saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone*. We cannot be saved by keeping the Law, for the Law demands perfection and we cannot be perfect. The Law, therefore, condemns us—it reveals all our deadly imperfections and pronounces God’s curse upon them. As a mirror reveals our blemishes but cannot heal them, so the Law exposes our sins but does not atone for them.

*“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.*

*“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.”*  
*(Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8,9)*

## ***FAITH LAYS HOLD ON THE SON OF GOD***

### **Who Jesus Is**

Jesus, the Son of God, is God. But, in order to save His people, He became a man. He was a real man, everything that Adam was (and lost) and more. This astounding fact is at the heart of Christianity, and is one of the keys to understanding the Good News of salvation —“God so loved...that He gave His only begotten Son.” The person we must look to for our salvation is the God-Man, fully God and fully man at the

same time. As God, His life was of such great value that He could pay the penalty for the sins of a great multitude of sinners. As a man, He could receive in Himself God’s wrath due to men. He humbly identified Himself with us sinners and experienced our weaknesses and infirmities, but, and this is important, without any sin of His own.

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

*“But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, made under the law...”*

*“For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens”* (John 1:1,14; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 7:26).

### **What Jesus Did**

◆ ***Jesus Christ lived a perfect life.*** God requires anyone who would fellowship with Him to be perfect, just like Him. But, sin makes this impossible for us! So Jesus Christ came as a man and perfectly obeyed the law for His people. His perfection was substituted for theirs.

*“For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God...”* (I Peter 3:18).

◆ ***Jesus Christ died a perfect death.*** He not only lived for His people, but died for them, too, giving Himself as a sacrifice to satisfy God’s justice. And, since His life is so precious, His sacrifice was accepted by the Father as of sufficient value to pay the penalty for the sins of every one of those for whom He died.

*“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one many shall be made righteous...”*

*“So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many...” (Romans 5:19; Hebrews 9:28).*

◆ **Jesus Christ conquered death.** Though He died and was buried, He arose! Later, He returned to Heaven as the great King of the universe. One day, according to His promise, He will return and gather all believers to Himself. Thus, everyone who receives eternal life now will enjoy it forever in Heaven with the Son of God.

*“For I delivered to you...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...”*

*“This same Jesus...who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven...”*

*“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am you may be also” (I Corinthians 15:3,4; Acts 1:11; John 14:3).*

### **JESUS CHRIST OFFERS SALVATION AS A GIFT TO BE RECEIVED BY FAITH**

◆ **Faith** Now, how may one receive this wonderful eternal life of which John 3:16 speaks? The answer really is quite simple: by faith. Not by works. By faith. But, what is faith? Maybe we first should consider what faith is by thinking about what it is not:

◆ **Not facts alone** Faith is not mere intellectual assent to a group of facts. It does indeed accept as true what the Bible says about God, and sin, and Christ, but it is more than this.

After all, the Bible says that even “the devils believe and tremble...!” Intellectual assent alone is not all that is meant by “saving faith.”

◆ **Not favors alone** Faith is not merely trusting God for favors. Some people think that because they look to God for health, or safety, or financial solvency, or guidance, and because they do indeed enjoy some of these things in measure, they therefore possess saving faith and God must truly love them as His children. Again, this is not so. God is so good that He does love all men with a common love. But this common love is not saving love. Just because one receives temporal favors from a good God does not mean he has been given eternal life.

◆ **Not feelings alone** Saving faith is not to be identified with religious feelings. There are people who get all mushy and teary when they hear “Silent Night,” or “The Old Rugged Cross.” Others really “get into” religious services and almost explode with enthusiasm for “the cause.” But such emotional experiences are not necessarily evidences of a true conversion. Don’t forget that Esau wept buckets of tears, *but he was not saved.* Faith certainly touches our emotions, but feelings alone do not prove it genuine.

◆ **Trusting Christ alone** So what is saving faith? *It is trusting,* receiving and resting on Jesus Christ alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel. *It is transferring* your trust for eternal life from yourself—your own goodness or goodnesses—to Christ. *It is believing* that you are truly guilty and justly condemned for your sin, and *calling* upon Jesus Christ for salvation, knowing all the while that it is in His righteousness alone that you are made acceptable to God.

◆ **Repentance** Saving faith is always accompanied with repentance. When you turn to Jesus, you turn away from yourself. You grieve over your guilt and the pollution in your soul. You hate what you are without Christ. You discover

a new, holy desire to love and serve your Creator and Redeemer with your whole heart and life.

### **THE GIFT**

And, when you do this—when you turn to Christ by faith—the Savior accepts you and gives you eternal life!

*“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household...”*

*“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” (Acts 16:31; John 6:37).*

### **BE A BELIEVER**

Now, how might YOU receive this wonderful gift? Ask for it. *Pray.* Right this minute —*tell* God that you recognize how sinful you are, and how totally unable you are to please Him in yourself or your works. *Ask* Him to enable you by His Spirit to believe: to embrace Jesus Christ and trust Him alone for your eternal salvation. Then, *thank* Him for keeping His promise. Now, *go.* Live for Him. Study and obey His Word. Pray often. Worship with His people in a Bible-believing church. Share your new faith and life with other Christians. Serve Him in the church and in the world. Talk about Him to unbelievers. It won’t be easy; the cost of following Christ is great. But it is the only life. It is eternal life.

—Paul Settle, Associate Minister

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