

What Does it Mean to Be a Christian? Part 1

Introduction:

1. Not even Christians know what it means...
 - **85%** of Americans call themselves Christians
 - Yet, **65%** of them believe that they will get to heaven because they are good people
 - Do you see a contradiction?
2. Being a Christian begins with a recognition that we are not **good** people and will never get to heaven because of our own goodness.

...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
(Romans 3:23)

We are not Good people

A. The world is full of **sin**.

1. Genesis 1 & 2—God created the world **perfect**
 - a. We were created for 3 purposes:
 - ...love **God**
 - ...love each **other**
 - ...care for God's **creation**
 - b. We have blown our responsibility to each one
 2. Genesis 3—We choose to **rebel** against God
 - a. What does the fruit represent?
 - The **knowledge** of good and evil.
 - We are no longer content being obedient children, we want to be our own **gods**.
 - Unfortunately, we are a part of the created order and are unable to **rise** above it.
 - This is not a simple little fairy tale about a silly piece of fruit... this is a philosophical and theological argument about why we have destroyed the world which accurately reflects the **brokenness** in this world.
 - b. Make a list of sins:
 - What is common about all sin: **selfishness**
 - Every sin is **selfish**, everything **selfish** is sin
 - Sin has to do with our desire to have our own way at the **expense** of another
- How do you act selfishly daily? (Romans 3:23)

B. Broken relationships

1. Sin leads to broken relationships with **God**, others, and with creation.
What happens to our relationships with others when we act in our own self-interest, without regard for others?
2. The only person who can heal broken relationships is the one who has been **hurt**
 - This is a basic principle of **forgiveness**
 - Once a relationship is broken, the power of the relationship falls to the one who has been hurt
3. When we sin, we not only hurt people and creation, we break our relationship with God. Why?
 - We are hurting another one of God's **children** or something for which God cares
 - An eye for an eye not only leaves both blind, but also hurts God **twice**
 - Only God can restore our broken relationship: remember, it is the one who has been hurt who has the power to restore a broken relationship.

Next Week: How does God restore a broken relationship?

What Does it Mean to Be a Christian, Part 2

How does God restore a broken relationship

Last Week:

1. We are all a part of the world's **problem**
2. Our selfishness and desire is at the expense of our relationship with...
 - ...**God**
 - ...each **other**
 - ...God's **creation**
3. Once a relationship is broken...
 - ...the power of the relationship shifts to the person who has been **hurt**
4. For us to enjoy a relationship with God, God must offer us forgiveness and restoration

Why do we need Jesus?

1. Jesus was not only a nice man.
 - a) He is God's **WORD** (John 1).
 - In the book of Genesis, when God created, God **spoke** a word
 - A **king** creates by speaking a word
 - When God speaks, **chaos** is ordered
 - Jesus is God's power of order out of the chaos
 - b) He is **God**.
 - Jesus is God's **announcement** that we can be forgiven and restored to a proper relationship with God.
 - This forgiveness was offered to us when Jesus willingly gave his life on a **cross**.
 - Our sin killed Jesus, his **love** forgave us. (Romans 5:8)
2. Other religions teach that by being a **good** person and going to worship, we can please God.

What are other religions?

(Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Jehovah Witness, Mormons)

3. Christians believe that being good will not get us into heaven.
 - We will always fall **short**.
 - There are many varieties of Christians, but all believe that it is Jesus who is the **source** of restored relationship with God.

- List other types of Christians: (*Baptists, Lutherans, Catholics, Pentecostals, Methodists, etc.*)

The Good news is that God does forgive us and restore us to relationship with each other. **St. Paul writes:**

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26)

Next Week: *How do I get into this right relationship with God?*

What Does it Mean to Be a Christian, Part 3

How do I get Into a Right Relationship with God?

1. A Relationship with God is a gift of **grace**
For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)
 - a. Grace—means a gift that is **free**.
 - A gift that has **strings** attached is not a gift
 - Grace is the **power** behind this relationship.
 - b. Faith—**through** faith.
 - It appears as though faith is our **part** in the process of salvation
 - Yet, even faith is a **gift** of God.
 - Faith is the **cradle** which holds grace; or, the outlet by which we access this power
 - Faith is not a belief in a list of doctrines, but a trusting **relationship**, just as a baby trusts its parent, without fully knowing or understanding.
 - We are babies in God’s loving arms
2. If God does everything, then what do I do?
 - a. **Relax!**
 - God loves us and is offering his grace.
 - It is as close to us as the air that we breathe.
 - Pray to God to gift you with **faith** that you might receive this grace.
 - God will answer your prayer and give you **salvation**.
 - We now are set free from the **bondage** to sin, and are set free to live our lives as trusting children of God.
 - b. Where do I go from here?
 - Once a person understands the price Jesus paid so that we might know God’s love, we begin to **walk** in that love of God, living our lives under God’s direction as obedient children.
 - This does not mean that we are **perfect** or will do everything right.
 - This is only a beginning of a life-long **relationship** with God.
 - Bit by bit, God will take away our selfishness and sin, replacing that with **love**.
 - We lead a life of growing in God’s grace called **discipleship**. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

I, _____, recognize that there is nothing I can do to earn God’s love and salvation. It is

God's love as expressed through Jesus Christ that brings me into relationship with Him. I submit myself on this day, _____, to this loving God's care. I promise to commit myself to God, and to the love and care of God's family, the church, so that I might continue to grow in my relationship with Christ.

Signed: _____

Witnessed by: _____

Get Baptized! Baptism is a sign of God's love for you and of God's commitment to you. We want you to share this precious gift with you!

Grow Further: Take our 12 week class for those new to faith: Discipleship 201 which will begin in January, every Tuesday, 6:30 PM.