

LESSON 1

WHAT IT MEANS TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

The problem of being born in sin and separated from God

The Bible explains that every one of us is born *'in sin'*, which means we all began life separated from God and a slave to sin. This was never God's original purpose or intention.

God first made man in his own image in order that we would live with him forever in a perfect relationship. However, the first man and woman God created – Adam and Eve – rejected him. They separated themselves from God by their own choice. They wanted to be 'gods' and live independently from him.

It was not that God was cruel, and that they had good reason to want to escape from him. God created everything that was good for them. God made a beautiful garden for them to live in, and before they sinned turning away from him, there was no pain, no suffering and no death. God proved in every way to be a loving father.

Despite all of God's goodness they chose to rebel against him and the consequences of their sinful action was to bring a curse upon all mankind. Their natures, and their children's natures, were changed from the image of God – holy and righteous – to sin. They, together with all their descendants, were disconnected and separated from God; and subject to spiritual and physical death.

Therefore, before you became a Christian you were a sinner, alienated from God and dead spiritually. The Bible says, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). There is nothing we can do to earn our way back to God. It is

simply impossible, because we were born sinners – for we all bear the sinful nature of Adam. Even our *“righteous acts”*, it says in the Bible, *“are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away”* (Isaiah 64:6).

The consequences of our sinful position are terrible! *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23), and being *“punished with everlasting destruction”* (2 Thessalonians 1:9). This punishment means spending eternity in hell. The Bible describes hell as a place of *“torment”* where there is *“weeping and gnashing of teeth”*; *“their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched”*; and, *“everyone will be salted with fire”* (Luke 16: 23, 28; Matthew 13:42). It is a dreadful place. In hell there is the absence of all that is good – nature (animals, birds, trees, flowers etc), friendships, hope, joy, peace and love.

The vast majority of people in the world don't expect or want to go to hell when they die. They all fall into one of two camps:

1. Those that say they are not religious but think they are good – by their own standards – and that they deserve to go to heaven when they die.
2. Those that try to be good through religious activities – going to a church/synagogue/mosque/temple, saying set prayers or meditating, giving offerings, going on pilgrimages, and even engaging in 'holy' wars/jihads. They believe that through being religious, they earn the right by their own efforts to go to heaven (or Nirvana, or Brahma etc).

Neither of these groups of people, however, will enter heaven because they have not accepted the one way that God has made available. Jesus said:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 14:6

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Matthew 7:13-14

“... I tell you the truth, I am the gate... All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers ... I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.”

John 10:7-10

The only solution to the sin and separation problem – Jesus Christ

Not all ways lead to God. There is only one way – Jesus. And only a relatively few people believe in Jesus and accept the Bible as God’s Word. So why is he the only way; the single and unique “gate”?

Jesus came to the earth from heaven with the express purpose to reconcile people back to God. The Bible says: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16)

Jesus is a unique Person. He is the Son of God who left heaven and appeared in human form; born as a baby in a little town called Bethlehem to a virgin whose name was Mary. He came to die to

(1) pay the penalty for people's sins, and

(2) provide the way for them to be 'born again', in order to reconcile people back to God.

1. Only the blood of Jesus cleanses away sin

Jesus paid the price for your sin when he died on the cross. When Jesus was crucified he died both spiritually and physically. While he hung on the cross, our sin was placed upon him and the Bible says *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21)*. He was forsaken by his Father and spiritually separated from him for the first time in all of eternity. Jesus was sinless and the perfect sacrifice to meet the justice requirements of God and, therefore, pay the penalty for the sins of the whole world.

GOODNESS TEST

Let's examine God's standard of goodness by considering some of the Ten Commandments:

"Have you ever lied?"

"Yes. Many times."

"What does that make you?"

"A liar I guess."

"Have you ever stolen something in your life?"

"Yes, but it wasn't like robbing a bank."

"Still you admit you stole something that wasn't yours. What does that make you?"

"A thief."

“Do you use God’s name or Jesus’ name like a word of disgust, fear or surprise?”

“Of course. Doesn’t everybody?”

“That’s called blasphemy. And it is a serious offence in God’s eyes.”

“Have you ever got angry at someone and called them derogatory names because they offended you in some way?”

“Yes, of course. I get angry a lot with people who annoy me.”

“Jesus said if you are angry with another person, you are harbouring murder in your heart.”

“Here is the last question: have you ever looked upon another person with lust?”

“Naturally. I’m only human.”

“Jesus said if you look upon another person with lust you are committing adultery in your heart.”

“So, by your own admission, you are a liar, a thief and a blasphemer, and you are a murderer and an adulterer of the heart.”

“Now, if you were to stand before God to give an account of your life, do you think you would be declared innocent or guilty of sin?”

“Guilty.”

So ... have you shown God you deserve to be in heaven or kept out of heaven?

The Bible says in Revelation 21: 8 that “... *the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.*”-

The fact is that we are all sinners and deserve to be punished, forbidden from entering heaven and sent to hell. We all want to go our own way and do our own thing, rather than obey God. Sin is only a matter of degree. This is why we need the forgiveness, cleansing and new spiritual birth that only Jesus can provide.

To receive forgiveness and cleansing for sin through the blood of Jesus, you must first acknowledge that you are a sinner. You probably thought – like most people – that you were a good person, by your own standard. But by God’s standard, and he sets the rules because he is God, everyone is a sinner. No-one is good like God. We are all born as sinners, incapable of being good like God. And this is the standard we must meet to enter heaven when we die. Jesus commanded *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* (Matthew 5:48).

The very first thing you do to become a Christian is to believe that Jesus paid the penalty for your own sin and receive his total forgiveness and cleansing. A spiritual exchange takes place whereby you give Jesus your sin and he gives you his righteousness in its place. The Bible says:

“In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”

Ephesians 1:7-8

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus), and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

Colossians 1:19-20

It is only through Jesus that sins can be forgiven and it is received as a gift:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Ephesians 2:8-9

It is impossible, therefore, to cleanse yourself from sin through religious duties. The only way possible is through believing and accepting that Jesus has paid the price in his own blood.

So ... do you now understand why the two groups of people are terribly misguided and, if they remain as they are, continue to be estranged from God and will find themselves in hell when they die.

It is only through Jesus – not being ‘true to yourself’ and ‘not hurting anyone’; not through Mohammed, Buddha or Krishna; not being a Jehovah Witness, Mormon or Catholic. It is only the blood of Jesus that can cleanse you from your sin.

The Bible says *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”* (John 3:18) And *“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.”* (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9) For *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12)

When you become a Christian and ask for God's forgiveness it must also be with a genuine desire to stop sinning and offending God. The Bible calls this "*repentance*". You must want to be free from sin so that you can truly know God and enter into a relationship with him. Repentance means to turn around 180 degrees and go in the opposite direction. You want to turn away from sin, and turn to God, to walk with him now in this life and be with him in heaven for all eternity: "***Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out...***". (Acts 3:19) Without repentance, there is no remission of sin. Repentance is the absolute bedrock to what it means to be an authentic Christian. (People that 'receive Jesus into their lives' in order to have a good life, without repentance from sin, are false Christians. They have not been forgiven by God, nor do they walk with him. They remain in sin.)

The Bible lists the sinful behaviours we must willingly and deliberately repent of when we become a Christian:

"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

Galatians 5:19-21

(*See *Occult, Cults and False Religions* below.)

2. Only Jesus can take away your sin-nature and make you 'born again' with a completely new and perfect, i.e. God-like, nature.

In order for you to walk in open communication and relationship with God, to live free from sin and possess the guarantee of a place in heaven, your sin nature must be removed and a new righteous nature put in its place. The Bible calls this to be made a "new creation" and to be "born again".

When you become a Christian, God not only frees you from the penalty of sin, but also the power of sin by making you a new creation; made again in his image. In this supernatural act of God, you are made spiritually alive to God, enabled to know God and be in relationship with him. He removes the "*old self*" (the old Adamic nature) and makes you an entirely new spiritual being; no longer sinful but now holy and righteous; like God himself. And he unites his Spirit with your spirit. This is a most astonishing and extraordinary spiritual experience, which revolutionizes your life and leads to a complete transformation – from a sinner to a saint:

"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."

Romans 6:6-7

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation ; the old has gone, the new has come!"

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

Jesus spoke of the new spiritual nature that replaces the old sinful nature as being “*born again*”, and revealed its necessity in no uncertain terms:

“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’

John 3:3, 5-7

When we are born again God makes us his very own son/daughter. He supernaturally gives us his own nature which is holy and righteous:

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

John 1:12-13

This new nature enables us to live free from sin as we walk in cooperation with his Spirit who comes to live inside us. When we are born-again God unites himself with us so that our bodies are described in an extraordinary way, as a “*temple*” in which God himself dwells:

“...he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit....your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God.”

1 Corinthians 6:17-19

When you become a Christian you willingly give up control over your own life and submit to God, obeying him and living a life

which is pleasing to him; as you walk in a relationship of covenant friendship with him. He gives you the ability to do this by recreating your own spirit and empowering you through the Holy Spirit who lives in you. You are given the extraordinary gift of “eternal life” by God, which is inter-union with your Creator, and defined by Jesus in this way:

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

John 17:3

The very essence of being a Christian, is the desire to know God and walk with him in this life, above anything and everything else; and to spend all of eternity with him in the next.

In summary, a Christian is someone who

1. admits:

“God in heaven, I am a sinner, separated from you, and in need of your mercy. I am sorry for the sins I have committed. I deserve punishment and a place in hell. I now trust that you Jesus paid the price for my guilt and shame when you were nailed to the cross. You suffered the judgement of death that I deserved. Please forgive and cleanse me Lord.”

2. repents, making a solemn pledge:

“I promise to turn from sin and to follow after you and love you with all of my heart, all of my soul, all of my mind and all of my strength. I want to know you and live in right relationship with you. Please teach me your truth and your ways. Jesus Christ, you are now the Lord of my life. I willingly lay down my life before you, and you alone.”

3. receives:

"I receive you Jesus Christ into my life by the Holy Spirit. Please make me now born-again, with a new nature like yours; that I might truly know you, and walk with you in righteousness, and be received by you into heaven when I die."

4. and, believes:

"By faith I rise up now your child, born-again of your Spirit, a brand new person in Christ, filled with your life, completely forgiven, free from the penalty and power of sin, and united to you."

If this is what you have done, you have become a Christian. You know in yourself something spiritually remarkable has taken place. You sense you are clean; that the burden of sin has been rolled off your shoulders. And that God is near. God has indeed made you a brand new person, his very own son/daughter. Your life is now filled with hope and a future. And you have the guarantee, written in the blood of Jesus and in the presence of the Holy Spirit within you, of a home in heaven when you die:

"Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

1 John 5:10-12

OCCULT, CULTS AND FALSE RELIGIONS

In becoming a child of God, you must repent of all direct and indirect involvement with the occult, cults and false religions, and thereby cease Satan's control over you. As you enter the Kingdom of God (the rule of God under his authority and blessing) you purposely leave the Kingdom of Satan (the rule of Satan under his authority and oppression). Here is a check-list for you to consider. If any item is relevant, you must deliberately confess, renounce and forsake your involvement or association. Any associated artefacts you still possess you should immediately destroy and discard.

Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as you read through the list and be careful to obey him if he brings anything to mind.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 1:9

Have you been involved in (whether actively, casually or even a 'one-off' occasion):

witchcraft, kabbala, black magic or white magic (i.e. use of supernatural forces), bloodpacts, spells, hex signs, hypnosis, parakinesis (control of objects through the 'power of the mind'), fortune telling, palm reading, tea leaf readings, phrenology (reading one's future through skull conformations), crystal ball, tarot cards, astrology, horoscopes, seance, ouija board, planchette (glass on the table), mediums, clairvoyance, automatic writing, charming, psychic healing, divining, use of a pendulum, levitation, table tipping, spirit knockings or rappings,

hallucinogenic drugs (LSD, heroin, marijuana etc.), pagan rites (Voodoo, Sing Sings, Corroborees, Fire Walking, Umbahda and Macumba), yoga, martial arts (karate, kung fu, aikido)

Confess your involvement with the practice as sin before God, renouncing it and promising never to engage in it again.

Have you ever trusted in:

amulets, occult letters of protection, talisman, magic picture, zodiac charms, crystals, pagan fetishes, idols (even so-called Christian e.g. Catholic icon)

These should all be destroyed and discarded; promising never to trust in them again.

Do you have in your possession:

false religion, cult and occult literature; satanic, cultic or pagan objects (e.g. an ankh – a cross with a ring top); demonically inspired music (e.g. heavy acid rock – consider the lyrics of the songs you listened to), demonically inspired posters; movies that promote sin/witchcraft/the occult

You may have these through direct and deliberate involvement, or perhaps unintentionally – maybe a gift from someone. These should all be destroyed and discarded.

Have you been a member of, or a participant with:

Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Worldwide Church of God, New Age Movement, Transcendental Meditation, Hari

Krishna, Eastern Mysticism, Guru Worship, Divine Light Mission, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Shintoism, Confucianism, Christian Science, Children of God, The Unification Church, Christadelphians, Freemasonry, Spiritualism, Ratanatism, Bahai, Scientology, Ranganatism, Religious Science, Anthroosophy, Theosophy, Rosecrucianism, Inner Peace Movement, Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship, Satanic Church

You must cease all association with the false religion renouncing it as falsehood, promising only to believe the truth as revealed by God in his Word, the Bible.