

How Does One Become A Christian

Introduction

“It is not what men eat but what they digest that makes them strong; Not what we gain but what we save that makes us rich; not what we read but what we remember that makes us knowledgeable; not what we preach but what we put into practice from God’s Word that makes us Christians.” (Author Unknown)

Text: Acts 26:28

1. In A.D. 59, the apostle Paul, a prisoner of the Roman government, was given an opportunity to speak in his own defense before the Roman procurator Festus, the Jewish king Herod Agrippa II, and Agrippa’s sister Bernice (Acts 24:27-26:32).
2. Following Paul’s speech, Agrippa replied, “*You almost persuade me to become a Christian.*”
 - A. It is my hope and prayer this morning that I will be able, through the inspired word of God, to persuade one to become a Christian!
3. The New Testament uses the word “Christian” three times: Acts. 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16. In each case, it is obvious that the word is used with reference to a follower of Jesus Christ.
4. In this study, we are asking the question: **how does one become a Christian?** If Agrippa had been completely persuaded to become a Christian, what would Paul have instructed him to do to become one?

5. The most often-heard answer to the question is that one simply needs to open his heart and accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior.

A. The New Testament certainly does speak of “receiving” Jesus Christ.

Col 2:6 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

B. But *how* is this done? Are any specific actions required other than the mere mental act of believing in Jesus Christ?

1) This question is important because Jesus Himself said:

Matt 7:21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven”.

2) So we are asking specifically what is involved in doing the will of the Father in order to become a Christian?

6. The New Testament often speaks of concepts such as:

A. Obedience to the faith:

Rom 1:5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,

Rom 16:26 but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith--

B. Obeying the truth - Rom 2:8; 1 Pet 1:22.

C. Obeying the gospel - Rom 10:16; 2 Thess 1:8; 1 Pet 4:17.

D. Obeying the doctrine - Rom 6:17.

7. How, then, does one obey the gospel in order to become a Christian?

God's Requirements for the Forgiveness of Sins

1. First, notice that becoming a Christian is the same as:

A. Becoming a *disciple* of the Lord

Acts 11:26And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

B. Becoming a *member* of the Lord's body, the church (Acts 2:47; Eph 1:22-23)

1 Cor 12:12-13 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free-- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

C. Being *saved*, forgiven of one's past sins - Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38.

D. Calling on the name of the Lord:

Acts 2:21 And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Acts 22:16 'And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

2. We need to look at the *conditions of the forgiveness of sins*. In order to obtain salvation we **MUST** have our sins forgiven!

3. Contrary to popular opinion, God has placed certain conditions on receiving the forgiveness of sins.

A. There are ONLY two possibilities:

- 1) **Salvation is unconditional.** If this is true, then God either saves everybody (but see **Romans 2:6-8**) or He arbitrarily saves some and condemns others (but see **Acts 10:34-35**; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9).
- 2) **Salvation is conditional.** If this is true, then God saves those who accept His terms for salvation - **Hebrews 5:9**.

B. God has done all that was necessary for Him to do to make the forgiveness of sins possible.

- 1) *We must accept the terms of God's pardon in order to procure the benefits available in Christ.*
- 2) God has made it possible to be reconciled to Him, but *we decide whether we will in fact be reconciled* - **2 Corinthians 5:19-21**.

C. Forgiveness is indeed a gift, but it is a conditional gift
Hebrews 5:9

Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved **through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

4. What are the conditions of God's forgiveness of sins?

- A. **Faith** (true belief that Jesus is the Son of God) - John 8:24; Rom 10:17; Heb 11:6.
- B. **Repentance** (change of will and action away from past sins) - Acts 17:30; Luk 13:3; Acts 3:19; 26:19,20; 2 Cor 7:10.
- C. **Confession of faith** (public acknowledgment of one's belief) - Rom. 10:9,10; Matt 10:32,33; John 12:42; 1 Tim 6:12,13.
- D. **Baptism** (immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins) - Acts 22:16; 2:38; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27; Col 2:12; 1 Pet 3:21.

5. New Testament examples show many cases of specific individuals who became Christians by meeting these terms.

- A. The Jews in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost - Acts 2:1-47 (vv.37,38,41,47).
- B. The Samaritans - Acts 8:5-12.
- C. The Ethiopian eunuch - Acts 8:26-39.
- D. Saul of Tarsus - Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-16).
- E. Cornelius and his household - Acts 10:1-48.
- F. Lydia and her household - Acts 16:14,15.
- G. The Philippian jailer and his household - Acts 16:25-34.
- H. Crispus and his household - Acts 18:7,8.

6. Observe that in the above examples the same series of events occurred.

- A. **The message of Jesus Christ was taught, producing faith.**
- B. **Faith produced godly sorrow and a turning from sin (repentance) and open acknowledgment of belief in Christ (confession).**
- C. **Repentance and confession of faith led to an immediate, urgent desire to be baptized.**
- D. **The baptized believers were then considered disciples or Christians. (Acts 2:41,47; Rom 6:3,4; Gal 3:27).**

7. But, there is a problem in the minds of many. Doesn't a person become a Christian *before* he is baptized? Let's let the New Testament answer.

A. In the above examples, why were people immediately baptized as soon as they believed the gospel?

1) In the case of the Philippian jailer, individuals were baptized in the middle of the night!

Acts 16:25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

2) Why the urgency, if baptism was not essential to the forgiveness of sins?

8. Notice what happens *at the point of baptism*:

Romans 6:3-4

A. We are placed "in Christ" (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27). Can one be saved outside of Christ?

B. We are associated with the death of Christ (Col 2:12). Can one be saved apart from Christ's death?

C. We are raised to a new life (2 Cor 5:17; Col 2:12). Can one be saved while still in his old life?

1) If one is **already alive in Christ before baptism, then when he is "*buried with Him in baptism*" (Col 2:12), he would be buried alive!**

9. The Bible does say baptism **IS ESSENTIAL** for the forgiveness of sins.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

A. A number of New Testament passages teach that *faith alone will not save a person.* (Matt 7:21; John 12:42; 1 John 2:4; 5:3)

James 2:24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

10. A person is not forgiven of his sins and does not become a Christian until he has been baptized.

What Is a Person Once He Has Become a Christian?

1. A "disciple" - Acts 11:26; John 8:31,32.
2. A "member" of the Lord's body, the church - Acts 2:41,47; 1 Cor 12:12,13.
3. One who must be in lifelong submission to the Lord's will.
Colossians 1:21-23; 2:6
4. One with the hope of heaven

1 Pet 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead**, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

Conclusion

1. **What causes a person to *want to* become a Christian? The word of God - **Romans 1:16**.**

 - A. **When one hears the word and believes it (Luk 8:4-15; **Romans 10:17**), he then is in a position to become a child of God, a Christian**

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

- B. **A person is born into the family of God when he submits to baptism, in which he is “born of water and the Spirit” (**John 3:5**).**
2. **How then does one become a Christian? By accepting God’s terms for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ: faith, repentance, confession, baptism.**
 3. **What would have happened had Agrippa believed in Jesus Christ and wanted to know what to do next?**
 - A. **Without any doubt, Paul would have told him exactly what Peter told the Jews on Pentecost who wanted to know what to do.**

Acts 2:38 “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”.

4. **As it was, Agrippa was “almost” persuaded to become a Christian.**
 - A. **So what about you this morning? Are you “almost” persuaded? Why not be *fully* persuaded, and obey the gospel this very morning in order to have your sins forgiven and to possess the hope of an eternal heaven?**

