

*Christian Essential #1*

# **FORGIVENESS**

**Forever by God**

**Discovering 6 Beliefs to  
Escape the Wrath of God**

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Scripture quotations are from the *New Living Translation* (NLT, Tyndale, 2007) unless otherwise noted. Other translations include the *New International Version* (NIV, Biblica, 2011).

Abbreviations for books of the Bible are taken from the *Society of Biblical Literature Handbook of Style* (Hendrickson, 1999).

The contents of this study are in accordance with the Statements of Faith of the National Association of Evangelicals (USA) and the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

All testimonies used in the *Christians Essentials* occurred in real life but names have often been changed.

Christian Essentials #1  
***FORGIVENESS***

**Week 1**

|            |  |  |
|------------|--|--|
| <b>1.1</b> | <b>What is Unique about the World's Biggest Religion?</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The unique person of Jesus Christ</li> <li>• The unique book &amp; beliefs of Christianity</li> <li>• The unique love of Christianity</li> </ul>    |
| <b>1.2</b> | <b>What Must I Believe About God to be Forgiven Forever?</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God the Father is both holy and loving</li> <li>• God the Father will punish all sin</li> <li>• God the Father is willing to forgive sin</li> </ul> |

Discussion time

**Week 2**

|            |   |  |
|------------|---|--|
| <b>1.3</b> | <b>What Must I Believe About Myself to be Forgiven Forever?</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God condemns you because you break His law</li> <li>• Your good deeds do not pay for your bad deeds</li> <li>• Why Jesus died on a cross</li> </ul> |
| <b>1.4</b> | <b>What Must I Believe About Jesus Christ to be Forgiven Forever?</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You admit you need a Savior</li> <li>• Jesus Christ paid for your sins</li> <li>• Jesus Christ is your Savior and King</li> </ul>                   |

Discussion time

**Week 3**

|            |   |  |
|------------|---|--|
| <b>1.5</b> | <b>How Can I Be Certain I Have Been Forgiven Forever?</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God wants His people to know for certain they are forgiven forever</li> <li>• Your forgiveness is proven by your new love for God &amp; people</li> </ul> |
| <b>1.6</b> | <b>Why Do Some Abandon Christ after believing?</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• False faith lacks fruit</li> <li>• False faith is deceptive</li> <li>• False faith was never saving faith</li> </ul>                                      |

Discussion time

**Week 4**

|            |   |   |
|------------|---|---|
| <b>1.7</b> | <b>What is God's First Commandment for a Christian?</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God wants you to be baptized</li> <li>• The purpose &amp; method of water baptism</li> <li>• Specific steps for water baptism</li> </ul> |
| <b>1.8</b> | <b>Where Do I Go From Here?</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does God want me to commit to?</li> <li>• How can you keep these commitments?</li> <li>• Why keep these commitments?</li> </ul>     |

Project: My Commitments

Discussion time

Appendix A: P.O.W.E.R. plan for Christian group discussions

Appendix B: Memory verses for the *FORGIVENESS* study

## Chapter 1.1

# What is Unique about the World's Biggest Religion?

*The founder, beliefs, book, & love of Christianity*

John 14:6

## Week 1

This study entitled *FORGIVENESS* is the first in the *Christian Essentials* series of discipleship materials. An online version can be obtained from the New Life Community Church website at [www.newlifecr.com](http://www.newlifecr.com).

This study is for several different audiences. First, if you are not a Christian and desire to know how to become one, this study explains how. Secondly, if you believe you are a Christian but want to understand how to be certain, this study will also explain how. Thirdly, if you are a new Christian planning to be baptized, this is a helpful study to prepare for that. Finally, the Gospel, or good news about God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ, is the most important message for all Christians. We never outgrow the need to be reminded of the great gift God has given us in Christ Jesus.

Regardless of your purpose for this study, you are encouraged to discuss its chapters with a small group of people to get the most out of it. If you are a Christian, you are encouraged to use the P.O.W.E.R. plan for small group discussion provided in Appendix A of this study.

- After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
- What did Jesus claim was unique about Him? What do you think?
  - What do Christians claim is unique about the Bible? What do you think?
  - Why do Christians claim their love proves they know God? What do you think?
  - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

**“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”** (John 14:6)

This is one of the most remarkable statements Jesus Christ ever made. No other leader of a major world religion has ever said anything like it. It is one of many things that are unique about Christianity and its founder Jesus Christ. This chapter's main point is:

Christianity is worth understanding because of its unique founder, beliefs, book, and love

## The unique person of Jesus Christ

A follower of Jesus asked Him how he could go to the Eternal Paradise of Heaven to be with God. Jesus said He was the only “*way*” to Heaven, that His teaching was the only “*truth*” about Heaven, and that He was the only one who could give someone eternal “*life*” (cf. John 14:5-6).

The Christian Bible says, “*There is salvation [from the wrath of God] in no one else [but Jesus]! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). And, “*There is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 2:5). Jesus and His followers claimed He was the only way to Heaven.

Jesus made many such unique claims. For example, He claimed to be God. Jesus said, “*Anyone who has seen me has seen [God] the Father*” (John 14:9-10). Buddha said, “I am a teacher in search of the truth.” But over 100 times Jesus is recorded in the Bible beginning His statements with, “*I tell you the truth*” (John 14:6). Confucius said, “I never claimed to be holy.” But Jesus challenged even His enemies, “*Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin?*” (John 8:46). And none could. Mohammed said, “Unless God throws his cloak of mercy over me, I have no hope.”<sup>1</sup> But Jesus said He had, “*the authority on Earth to forgive sins*” (Matt 9:6). Every other religious leader in the world has died and stayed dead. But Jesus said, “*After three days I will rise from the dead*” (Matt 27:63), and He did!

To a group of religious leaders Jesus said:

*“You are from below; I am from above. You belong to this world; I do not. . . . Unless you believe that I am who I claim to be, you will die in your sins. . . . I tell you the truth, anyone who obeys my teaching will never die!”* (John 8:23, 51).

Statements like this led the Oxford Professor C. S. Lewis to remark:

I want to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing they often say about Jesus: ‘I am ready to accept Him as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is one thing we must not say.

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice.

Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Now it seems obvious to me that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God. <sup>2</sup>

Likewise, the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte wrote:

I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no comparison. Alexander the Great, Caesar Augustus, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires; but on what foundation did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded an empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him. <sup>3</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi described Jesus as, “A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act.” <sup>4</sup>

With such a unique and powerful founder, it is not surprising that Christianity is the largest religion in the world with over 2 billion claiming to be followers. <sup>5</sup> K. S. Latourette, Professor of History at Yale University wrote: “As the centuries pass, the evidence is accumulating that, measured by His effect on history, Jesus is the most influential life ever lived on this planet.” <sup>6</sup> We even divide human history by the birth of Christ (B. C. “before Christ” and A. D., Latin for *anno Domini*, “the year of our Lord”).

Therefore, it would seem worthwhile to understand what is unique about Christianity, and what it says about obtaining eternal life and reaching a perfect paradise called Heaven.

## **The unique beliefs & book of Christianity**

Jesus Christ and His followers teach the following 10 things that are unique to Christianity:

- 1) The Christian Bible is the only sure source of God’s word to humans (cf. 2 Tim 3:16).
- 2) God is three united Persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (cf. John 1:1-3, 18; 2 Cor 3:17-18; Matt 28:19).
- 3) God the Son, Jesus Christ, came to Earth by being born as a man through a virgin woman by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt 1:20-23).
- 4) Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, sacrificed His life to pay for the sins of others, and rose from the dead to prove it (cf. John 8:46; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Cor 15:3-8).
- 5) People cannot pay the penalty of their sins by doing good deeds (cf. Rom 3:20; Eph 2:8-9).

- 6) Trusting in Christ's death to pay for your sins is the only way to be forgiven by God (cf. John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5).
- 7) Christians are given eternal forgiveness and life that can never be taken from them, and they can be absolutely certain they possess these things and will go to eternal Paradise (cf. John 6:37-40; 1 John 5:13).
- 8) Followers of Christ are permanently indwelt with the Holy Spirit, recreating them spiritually, resulting in a new desire and supernatural ability to obey God and love people (cf. John 3:5-6; Eph 1:13-14; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:22-24; Gal 5:22-23).
- 9) There is an evil being called the devil (which means "liar") who, with his demons, invisibly rules the anti-Christian people of the world (cf. John 8:43-45; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 6:12; 1 John 3:8-10; 5:19).
- 10) Christ will come again, defeat all His enemies, and establish His righteous reign in a perfect Paradise on a New Earth forever (cf. Matt 24:29-31; 2 Thess 1:6-10; 1 Cor 15:20-28; Rev 21:1-5).

Some of these beliefs reveal another uniqueness of Christianity. It is a loving relationship with God based on grace and acceptance, not a harsh religion based on fear and performance. Your forgiveness and acceptance from God are based on that relationship, not on following rules.

What are the beliefs of Christians based on? The Christian Bible of which the Apostle Paul wrote: "*is inspired by God*" (2 Tim 3:16). The Bible is by far the most printed book in the world with 3 billion copies. <sup>7</sup> It is also the most translated book with over 2000 languages. All of this is because it has transformed more lives than any other book in the world.

Why should you believe the Christian Bible contains words from God? First, the history of the events recorded in it have been confirmed by historians and archeologists. <sup>8</sup> The people described in the Bible were real people, including Jesus Christ. Albert Einstein said, "No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life." <sup>9</sup>

Secondly, nothing in science has disproved the Bible. In fact, the more you discover about Creation's intricate design, the more evidence you have that God created the world just like the Bible teaches. <sup>10</sup>

Thirdly, scholars have concluded that there are 737 predicted events in Scripture. Scholars have also demonstrated that over 600 of the Bible's predictions have already come true exactly when and how they were supposed to. No other book or writings of the major religions contain fulfilled prophecies like the Christian Scriptures. <sup>11</sup> This is because only the Bible was inspired by God who alone can predict the future.

127 of the fulfilled predictions in the Bible were perfectly fulfilled by Christ. For example, around 700 B.C. the Prophet Isaiah wrote: "*The Lord Himself will give you the [miraculous] sign. Look! The virgin will conceive*

a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')" (Isa 7:14). About 700 years later Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, claiming and proving He was God in a human body.<sup>12</sup>

All of this is proof that the remaining 130 some prophecies in the Bible will also come true. These primarily refer to the Second Coming of Christ.

## **The unique love of Christianity**

The religion that has the most love is the most likely to be from God. Christians have proven to be among the most loving people in the world. Christians have started more hospitals, schools, orphanages, and relief agencies for natural disasters, famine, women's rights, slavery, and poverty in the world than all other religions combined.

In his extensive study, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?: The Positive Impact of Christianity in History*, Dr. D. James Kennedy documents his claim: "Despite its humble origins, the [Christian] Church has made more changes on earth for the good than any other movement or force [or religion] in history."<sup>13</sup>

History confirms that other religions often produce stagnant societies and even violent ones. But Christian nations are by far the most peaceful and prosperous. For example, in the mid 1800's you could buy a slave in the Fiji Islands for less than a cow, and then you could work that slave or eat them. But a number of years later you could not buy a slave to beat or eat because Christianity had transformed the people.<sup>14</sup>

No other religion in the world can claim even *one* such example. Not Buddhism, Hinduism, Humanism, Islam, Marxism, or New Age. And the history of Christianity can boast of a multitude more. In fact, it was Christians like William Wilberforce in England and Abraham Lincoln in America that ended slavery in their countries and Christians are the most aggressive at working to end slavery around the world today.

Even enemies of the Christian faith have admitted its unique power to change people. Many years ago someone criticized Christians in the *London Times*. An experienced traveler wrote a letter to the editor saying that such an attitude was foolish. This was because if this critic of Christianity found himself stranded on a deserted island which were often inhabited by violent people, they should fervently pray that Christian missionaries had gotten there first to change the people. The writer of the letter who defended the power of Christianity was Charles Darwin, the founder of evolutionary theory.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus foretold to His followers: "*Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples [followers]*" (John 13:35). Perhaps you have experienced the unique love and kindness of a Christian? Of course there are too many people who claim to be Christians but do not act like it. As we will see later in this study, God forbids anyone to claim they are a Christian if they do not love people. Real Christians are the most



patient, kind, hard-working, honest, and loving people you will know. C. S. Lewis described them in this way:

[Christians] are dotted here and there all over the earth. Every now and then one meets them. Their very voices and faces are different from ours: stronger, quieter, happier, and more radiant. They love you more than others do, but they need you less.<sup>16</sup>

Christians believe all of this is proof that they uniquely have a power through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that radically changes them into people who radically love other people. And their unique love gives Christians a reason to claim they know the only way to God and Heaven.

Jesus said: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). Accordingly, Christianity is worth understanding because of its unique founder, beliefs, book, and love.

- ▶ Return to the beginning of this chapter and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Read the next chapter to prepare for your small group this week.

<sup>1</sup> For quotes from Buddha, Confucius, and Mohammed see Billy Graham, *The Reason for My Hope*, (Nelson, 2013), 94.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper Collins, 2001), 54-56.

<sup>3</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte, “On the Divinity of Jesus Christ, at Saint Helena, 1820,” [www.godtheoriginalintent.com/PDF%20Chapters/Napoleon20Bonaparte.pdf](http://www.godtheoriginalintent.com/PDF%20Chapters/Napoleon20Bonaparte.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> “Mahatma Gandhi, “Fasts for Communal Peace” online at [http://www.mkgandhi.org/g\\_communal/chap25.htm](http://www.mkgandhi.org/g_communal/chap25.htm).

<sup>5</sup> According to the *World Religion Database*, in 2010 there were about 2.3 billion followers of Christianity. This is compared to about 1.5 billion Muslims, 1 billion Hindus, and about .5 billion Buddhists. See online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major\\_religious\\_groups](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_religious_groups).

<sup>6</sup> K. S. Latourette, online at <http://www.tentmaker.org/Quotes/jesus-christ.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> For a list of the most printed books in the world see online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_most-printed\\_books](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most-printed_books).

<sup>8</sup> For explanations of the historical accuracy of the Bible see online at <http://www.icr.org/biblical-record/>

<sup>9</sup> Albert Einstein, quote taken from “*What Life Means to Einstein*,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 26, 1929; <http://www.jewishvoice.org/who-is-yeshua/quotes-about-jesus/>

<sup>10</sup> For explanations of the how the Bible’s description of creation is confirmed in modern science see online at <http://www.icr.org/bible-genesis/>

<sup>11</sup> For an examination of some claims that the Koran contains fulfilled prophecy see online at [http://www.answering-islam.org/Responses/Shabir-Ally/q14\\_prophecy.htm](http://www.answering-islam.org/Responses/Shabir-Ally/q14_prophecy.htm)

<sup>12</sup> J. Barton Payne in his detailed study, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* documents these figures (1973). For a description of several of the most important and amazing biblical predictions that have come true see online at <http://trainingtimothys.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/9.8-The-Divine-Record-of-Biblical-Prophetsx.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?: The Positive Impact of Christianity in History* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy, 27.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>16</sup> Lewis, 223.

## Chapter 1.2

## What Must I Believe about God to be Forgiven Forever?

*He is holy and will punish all sin, but He is also loving and willing  
to forgive sin*

John 3:16, 18

### Week 1

- After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
- Why do people make too little of God's love? Does this describe you?
  - Why do people make too little of God's hatred for sin? Does this describe you?
  - How does the death of God the Son reconcile God the Father's justice and mercy?
  - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

**God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. . . . But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son.**  
(John 3:16, 18)

John 3:16 is the most famous statement that Jesus Christ made. It briefly explains the central message of Christianity. But Jesus' full statement also includes a critical warning. In this chapter you will learn:

God the Father is holy and will punish all sin, but He is also loving and willing to forgive sin.

### God the Father is holy and loving

Perhaps you are one of those people who doubts God's love. You are overwhelmed with how much you have broken God's commandments and struggle to believe God could forgive you. John 3:16 is good news for you! "*God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*"

If you doubt God can forgive you, the Apostle Paul, perhaps the greatest Christian to ever live, wrote the following to encourage you:

*I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted his people. . . . Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus.*

*This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"- and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life. (1 Tim 1:13-16)*

God's love is great enough to completely forgive "*even the worst sinners.*" Therefore, God's love is certainly great enough to forgive you. <sup>1</sup> Do not make the mistake of thinking too little of God's love.

But perhaps you are like many people who think too little about God's holiness. To be holy means to hate sin and separate yourself from it. Sin is breaking God's laws. Because God the Father is holy He hates sin and separates Himself from sinners. The Bible says of God, "*You are pure and cannot stand the sight of evil*" (Hab 1:13). Therefore, people who think too little about God's holiness think too little about their sin and God's desire to punish it. In fact, they think too little about God.

One of the worst mistakes humans make is to presume that God the Father already loves them and therefore will forgive them. Maybe they know Christ's most famous statement above that God the Father loves the world. Unfortunately, this has given many a false sense of security in their relationship with Him. Especially those who think too little of their sin and God the Father's holiness. They think, "If God loves me then certainly He will forgive me."

Unfortunately many people do not read what Jesus said just two verses after saying God loves the world in John 3:16. In verse 18 He said: "*Anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son.*" Also a few verses later we read: "*Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment*" (John 3:36). Do not make the mistake of thinking too little of God's holiness and hatred for your sin.

How can both John 3:16 and John 3:18 be true? If God the Father loved the world enough to send His Son to die, why does "*God's wrath remains on*" some? These statements are simply stating the primary point of this chapter: God the Father is holy and will punish all sin, but He is also loving and willing to forgive sin. And believing both of these things about God the Father is necessary to be forgiven by Him.

## **God the Father will punish all sin**

What do you think is the biggest problem in your life? What is the thing you need to fear the most? Losing your job? Losing a friendship? Getting sick? Dying? If you do not trust and follow Jesus, then your greatest problem is none of these. Your biggest problem is God. The thing you need to fear the most is being punished by God. Jesus said:

*Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matt 10:28)*

If you do not have a right relationship with God the Father you should “be afraid of” Him because He will “destroy both soul and body in hell.” In the Bible, Hell is the place of eternal punishment for those who do not trust and follow Jesus Christ. The Bible says of Jesus Christ:

*He will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power. (2 Thess 1:7-9)*

“The Good News of our Lord Jesus” is that you can be completely forgiven forever through Jesus Christ. If you “refuse to obey the Good News,” you “will be punished with eternal destruction.”

Because Hell is a real place, Jesus talked about it more often than Heaven including:

*That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt 13:49-50)*

The Bible talks a lot about God being angry with people who break His laws. The Prophet Isaiah wrote: “The LORD of Heaven's Armies will be exalted by his justice” (Isa 5:16). The Father’s “justice” will result in the punishment of people who break His laws. What kind of God would just let people disobey Him without penalty? That would be a weak god. The real God is not weak.

God’s anger against the world will be very clear at the end of the world. He said through the Prophet Isaiah:

*See, the day of the LORD is coming- the terrible day of his fury and fierce anger. The land will be made desolate, and all the sinners destroyed with it. . . . "I, the LORD, will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their sin. I will crush the arrogance of the proud and humble the pride of the mighty. I will make people scarcer than gold . . . For I will shake the heavens. The earth will move from its place when the LORD of Heaven's Armies displays his wrath in the day of his fierce anger." (Isa 13:9, 11, 13)*

But God the Father’s anger will not only be revealed and experienced at the end of a person’s life. As we have already read: “Anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son” and “Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them” (John 3:18, 36).

God the Father punishes such people when they die, but He is also punishing them now. This is why so many people experience bad, hurtful things in their lives and feel so empty and without hope. What would we expect when they do not have a relationship with their Creator and He is angry with them because they constantly break His laws? Unfortunately, most people belittle the glory, holiness, and justice of God the Father and how much He hates disobedience. He is God after all!

### **God the Father is willing to forgive sin**

God the Father is holy. He hates your sin and will punish all of it. But thankfully He is also willing to provide a way to forgive your sin. That is why *“He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16) and be forgiven forever.

This is important for those who think too much of their sin and too little of the mercy of the Father. God the Father demonstrated His desire to rescue people from the penalty of their sin when *“He gave his one and only Son”* to die for those sins.

No matter how great your sin, God the Father’s plan for your forgiveness will work if you will submit to it. God is the only One with the authority to eternally punish or forgive sin. And He has promised that Christ’s death will pay the full penalty of your sin if you will trust and obey His Son.

Unfortunately, the good news about forgiveness forever through Jesus Christ (the Gospel) will mean little to you if you deny you deserve God’s punishment and need His forgiveness. Again, most people presume that God the Father loves everyone the same way and that all are His children. But this is not so. It is true, as Jesus said of God the Father: *“He gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike”* (Matt 5:45). The Father is kind and good to all humans just by giving them life and providing for them.

But the Father does not accept or forgive everyone. Only His children. And contrary to what many believe, most humans are not God’s children. The Bible says of Jesus Christ:

*He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. . . . But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:10, 12)*

You do not possess the acceptance, protection, and privileges of being a son or daughter of God the Father just by being born into this world. Only those who have *“believed” “and received”* Jesus Christ as their only Savior and King are given *“the right to become children of God.”* God is the Creator of all people but not the father of all people. Many people do not even want God to be their father. They reject God’s Son instead of trust and accept Him. Therefore God rejects them.

The Father is going to punish every single one of your sins. He can do this by the punishment He gave His Son when He died hanging on a cross. Or He will punish your sins by sending you into the fire of Hell. But if you are one of those who will accept Christ's sacrifice for your sins then God can be both just and loving toward you. Just, because your sins were punished. Loving, because His Son suffered the punishment for you. The death of God the Son demonstrates that God the Father is holy and will punish all sin, but He is also loving and willing to forgive sin.

God the Father is holding out a peace offering to you in His Son. If you accept it, the Father will accept you. If you reject Christ, the Father will reject you. As Jesus said:

*God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. . . . But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. (John 3:16, 18)*

God the Father is holy and will punish all sin, but He is also loving and willing to forgive sin.

- ▶ Return to the beginning of this chapter and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Meet with your group this week to discuss chapters 1.1-1.2.

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<sup>1</sup>Some will object that Jesus spoke of an “unforgiveable sin” (Matt 12:32). But this described people whose hearts were so hard that when they saw Jesus heal a man they claimed He did it with the devil's power. For more on this see *Christian Essentials Study #3, FAITH*, and the chapter entitled “Your Dad's Pardon III.”

## Chapter 1.3

## What Must I Believe About Myself to be Forgiven Forever?

*My sins deserve God's punishment and my good deeds  
cannot pay the penalty*

Romans 3:20, 3:23

### Week 2

- After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
- If you were to die today, and God were to ask you: “Why should I let you into My Heaven?” What would you say?
  - What are some ways you have sinned and broken God’s laws?
  - According to Christianity, why will our good deeds not be able to pay for our bad deeds?
  - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

**“Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard”** (Rom 3:23).

**“No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are”** (Rom 3:20).

How would you answer the following vital question: *If you were to die today, and God were to ask you: “Why should I let you into My Heaven?” What would you say?* Most people respond they have not done anything bad enough to be rejected by God. Or they have done enough good things to pay for the bad things in their life. Many compare themselves to bad people and conclude they are relatively good people. The Bible says all of these people are wrong. And they are wrong about the most important question they need to answer: Why would God accept me?

You read in the last chapter there is a great penalty for sin. The important question then is how do you obtain God’s forgiveness for your sin? Most people answer that question in the wrong way, and end up paying for it for eternity. The main point of this chapter is:

Your sins deserve God’s punishment and your good deeds cannot pay the penalty.

## God condemns you because you break His laws

Why is God angry with people and planning to punish them for eternity? Because they break His laws which the Bible calls sin. The Bible says: *“If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar”* (1 John 1:10). Sin is breaking the laws of God. Christians believe some of these laws are communicated in the Ten Commandments of which God said:

*I am the LORD your God . . . You must not have any other god but me. You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind . . . You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. . . .*

*You must not misuse the name of the LORD your God. The LORD will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name. . . . Honor your father and mother. . . . You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely against your neighbor. You must not covet your neighbor's house. You must not covet your neighbor's wife . . . or anything else that belongs to your neighbor. (Exod 20:2-5, 7, 12-17)*

Have you ever loved anyone or anything more than God? Have you ever used God's or Jesus' name as a swear word? Have you ever dishonored your parents, stolen something, lied about something, or wanted something that belonged to someone else? Then you have broken a commandment of God and sinned against Him.

However, sin is not just your outward actions, but also your inward thoughts and attitudes. Jesus said:

*You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! . . .*

*You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt 5:21-23, 27-28)*

God knows your life and how much you sin against Him in your actions. God also knows your mind and how much you sin against Him in your thoughts. And if you are honest, you know how much you break God's laws too. As the Bible says: *“Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard”* (Rom 3:23).



## **Your good deeds do not pay for your bad deeds**

Many think God gave you His laws such as the Ten Commandments so you will know how to be accepted by God. They think they can pay for the bad things they do, by doing good things. But the purpose of God's commandments are not to show you how to pay for your sins. Instead, God's "*law simply shows us how sinful we are*" (Rom 3:20).

One of the biggest mistakes that humans make is believing their good deeds earn them a place in Heaven. They compare themselves with "bad" people and conclude that surely God will accept them. There are several problems with that. First of all, Jesus said relatively very few people are going to go to Heaven. Jesus taught:

*You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to [eternal] life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. (Matt 7:13-14)*

We must ask a very important question here. Why did Jesus say "*only a few*" people will "*find*" the "*gateway to [eternal] life*"? Especially if the "*road*" to eternal life is good deeds? If being good is how you get to Heaven, wouldn't there be many people going instead of "*few*"? The answer is this. The reason that "*only a few*" people will "*find*" the "*gateway to [eternal] life*" is because most people will try to find the road to eternal life by being good. Most people think good deeds is the road and gate to Heaven, but it is not. And that is why "*the many*" are on "*the highway to hell.*" As the Bible text for this chapter tells you: "*No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands*" (Rom 3:20).

One of the reasons that your good deeds cannot pay for your bad deeds is that the Bible says: "*The wages of sin is death*" (Rom 6:23). A wage is something you earn, and according to God, you earn the death penalty when you sin. No amount of good deeds will pay the death penalty. Only dying pays the penalty of your disobeying God.

Sin has infected even the good things you try to do. Imagine that you were infected with leprosy. But you wanted to make some food as a good deed for your friend. Would your friend accept the food? No, because they would not want to be contaminated. This is how it is with God. He is perfectly pure and cannot have any contact with any sin, or people who are infected with sin.

The Prophet Isaiah said: "*We are constant sinners; how can people like us be saved? We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags*" (Isa 64:5-6). God will not accept your "*righteous deeds*" because you are "*infected and impure with sin.*" More often than you might think, even the good things you do are motivated by selfish desires.

## Why Jesus died on a cross

You began this chapter with an important question: Why do you think you will be accepted by God? Many answer they have not done something bad enough to be rejected by God. Many others think their good deeds, such as going to church and giving money, will earn God's acceptance. But if that was true, why did the Father have to send His Son to die on a cross for your sins? Think about it. Does your belief about how to be accepted by God even need the death of God's Son for you? Do you even believe you needed Christ to die for you? If you believe your good deeds will you're your way to Heaven, you do not need Christ to die for you. But you needed Christ to die for your sins because your good deeds do not pay for your bad deeds.

God will only forgive those who admit their good deeds will not pay for their bad deeds. Most people refuse to admit this and try to justify themselves before God. They refuse to believe that *"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom 6:23). Why did Jesus die? Because: *"The wages of sin is death."* Only death pays for your sins. Either Christ's death or your death. But not your good deeds. The Bible says to Christians:

*It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.* (Eph 2:8-9 NIV)

What are you *"saved"* from? God's eternal punishment for breaking His laws. Why are you forgiven? *"By grace"* which is God's undeserved kindness. How are you forgiven? *"Through faith"* in Christ paying for your sin by dying on the cross. Why can *"no one . . . boast"* about being forgiven by God? Because even your saving *"faith,"* and every other requirement for forgiveness *"is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God"* and *"not by works"* you have done. It is all God's work to rescue you from the penalty of your sin.

This is another unique belief of Christianity. Like many religions, Christianity teaches that *"Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard"* (Rom 3:23). But every other religion in the world claims you can pay for your bad deeds by doing good deeds. Real Christianity alone proclaims: *"No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands"* (Rom 3:20). Therefore, your sins deserve God's punishment and your good deeds cannot pay the penalty.

- ▶ Return to the beginning of this chapter and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Read the next chapter to prepare for your discussion this week.

## Chapter 1.4

## What Must I Believe About Jesus Christ to be Forgiven Forever?

*Jesus Christ is my only Savior and King*

Romans 3:22, 10:9

### Week 2

**“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”** (Rom 10:9)

You read in the previous chapter: *“No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands”* (Rom 3:20). This means you cannot earn the Father’s forgiveness with good deeds. How then do you obtain God’s forgiveness? The main point of this chapter is:

You are forgiven forever if you trust that Christ’s death paid the penalty for your sins and believe He is your risen Lord.

This is the Gospel, the good news about forgiveness forever through Jesus Christ!

### **You are forgiven because you admit you need a Savior**

Unfortunately, if you refuse to believe the bad news about the punishment your sins have earned, the good news about God’s forgiveness will mean nothing to you. The bad news is that you have disobeyed God and earned the penalty of His punishment. But if you refuse to believe this, you will not believe you need to be forgiven by God.

If you believe you can earn God’s acceptance by doing good deeds, you will not care that God had His Son die to pay for your sin.

Imagine that you had cancer and there was a cure for it. If you refused to believe or admit you were deathly sick you would not value or pursue the cure because you do not understand or admit your need. Just the same, if you do not believe you need to be rescued from the wrath and punishment of God because of your disobedience to His laws, then you will not value the cure for sin that God offers through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, if your conscience and the Holy Spirit are convincing you that you are a sinner deserving God’s judgment, then the forgiveness of God is good news! In fact, the very best news you will ever hear.

## **You are forgiven because Jesus Christ paid for your sins**

Why does the Father forgive the penalty of your sins if you believe in His Son Jesus Christ? The Bible says:

*God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. (Rom 3:24-25)*

What then is forgiveness from God based on? Jesus Christ has done everything for you. He lived a pure life for you. He paid the death penalty for you when He died on the cross. The Bible says, “*God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ*” (2 Cor 5:21). Also, “*Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God*” (1 Pet 3:18). God has allowed Jesus to pay the death penalty of your sin for you. And God has offered to transfer Christ’s righteousness to you!

In the previous chapter you learned that no human can be good enough to be forgiven by the Father. But God the Son was good enough. And as God in a human body, He alone could be good enough. This is why Jesus said this about getting to Heaven: “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6).

Imagine that you are in court before a judge to pay a fine for breaking a law. But you do not have enough money and will therefore be put in jail. The judge could justly require you to pay the penalty for your crime. But instead he stands up and removes his robe, comes around to your side of the judge’s bench, and gives you money to pay the fine. Then he returns to his seat, accepts the payment he gave you, and sets you free. This is what God has done through Christ for those who will receive His gift.

Some people struggle with receiving the Father’s forgiveness because they feel unworthy. No one has ever died for them like Jesus did, or forgiven them like the Father desires to. They are so aware of their sins they doubt the Father could completely forgive them. But the blood that God the Son shed for sin is precious and powerful enough to pay for any amount of sin. God’s love is big enough to cover and forgive your sins. The Bible says to Christians: “*He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross*” (Col 2:13-14). When you become a Christian, God erases any record of your sins because His Son already suffered for them.

## **You are forgiven because you believe in Jesus Christ as your only Savior and King**

How do you obtain this wonderful gift of forgiveness from God? Like any other gift offered, you simply receive it. You receive the Father's gift of forgiveness by trusting in the name of Jesus Christ. What does the name Jesus Christ mean? Jesus (Hebrew: *Joshua*) means Savior. Christ (Hebrew: *Messiah*, "anointed one") means King.

Trusting in Jesus as your Savior means you depend on Him to rescue you from the penalty for your sins. Believing in Christ as your King means you gladly agree to follow Him and obey His commands. The Lord Jesus Christ cannot be divided. You cannot believe in Him as only your Savior and reject Him as your King. In fact, as discussed in the next chapter, obeying Christ as your King is the only sure proof that you have truly trusted in Him as your Savior.

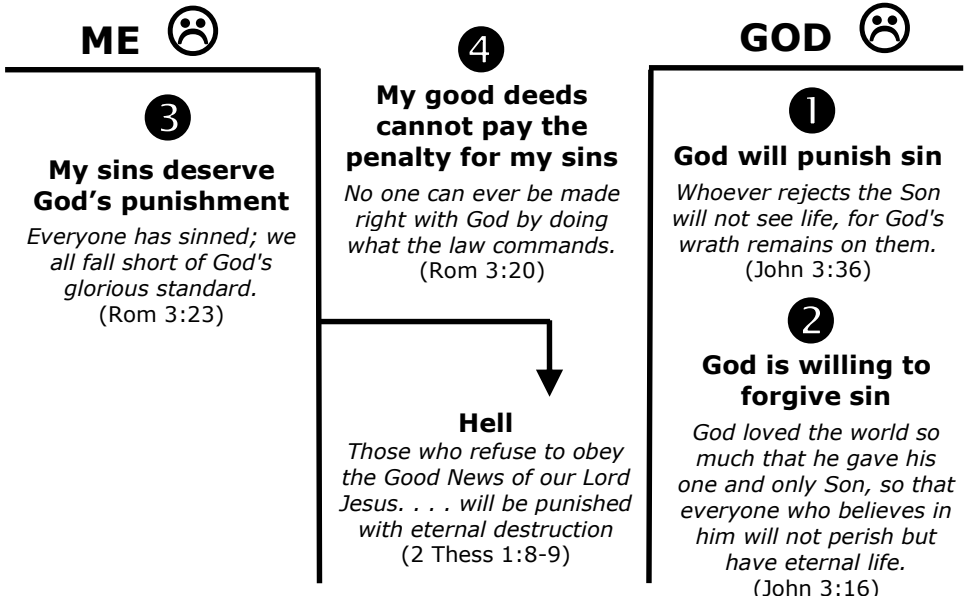
The Bible says: "*He was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit*" (Rom 1:4). Accordingly, the Bible says: "*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*" (Rom 10:9). When God raised Christ from the dead it was proof that He is the only one that can rescue you from the penalty of sin which is death.

The Bible calls Jesus "Savior" only about ten times, but calls Him "Lord" about *700 times!* If you want the Father's forgiveness you must trust that Jesus saves you from the penalty of your sin *and* that Christ is the King you will obey. You are forgiven forever if you trust that Christ's death paid the penalty for your sins and believe He is your risen Lord.

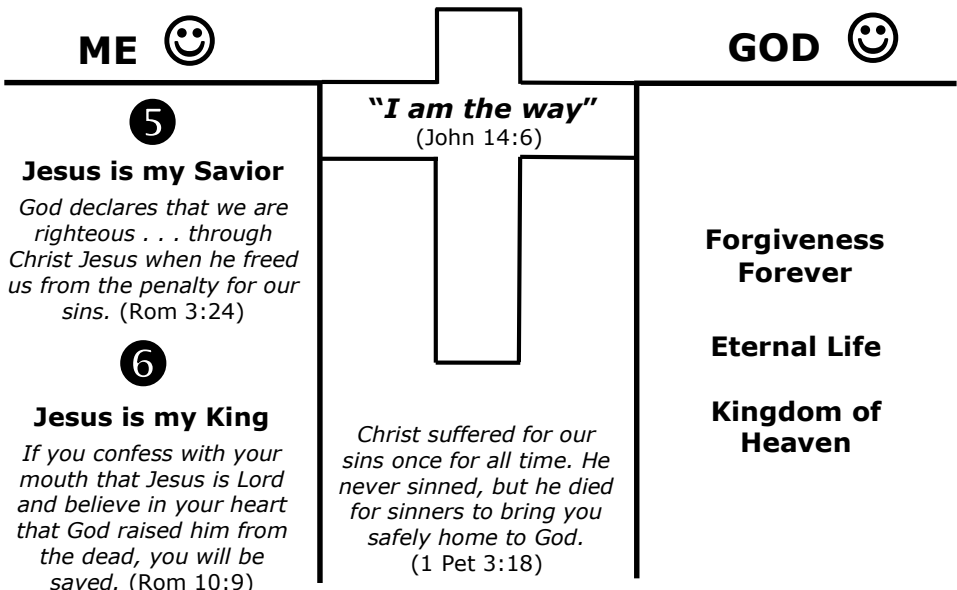
- The following summarizes the 6 things you must believe about God the Father, yourself, and God the Son to become a Christian:
  - ❶ The Father will punish sin because He is holy.
  - ❷ The Father is willing to forgive sin because He is loving.
  - ❸ My sins deserve God's punishment.
  - ❹ My good deeds cannot pay the penalty for my sin.
  - ❺ Jesus Christ is my only Savior who paid for my sin by dying for them and being raised from the dead.
  - ❻ Jesus Christ is my King and I want to obey His commandments.
- ▶ A picture of these beliefs is the "Cross Diagram" on the next page.
- ▶ You can express these 6 beliefs to God in prayer to receive His forgiveness now. Do you need and want to do this?
- ▶ Meet with your group this week to discuss chapters 1.3-1.4 of this study.

# "Cross Diagram" 6 Essential Beliefs to be Forgiven Forever

## Eternal destiny for those without Christ



## Eternal destiny for those with Christ



## Chapter 1.5

## How Can I Be Certain I Have Been Forgiven Forever?

*You have a new love for God and People*

1 John 5:13; 3:10

### Week 3

► After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?
- Why does God want us to be certain we have eternal forgiveness?
- How can we be certain we have eternal life and forgiveness?
- On a scale of 1 to 100% how certain are you that you will go to Heaven?

**“I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life”** (1 John 5:13).

**“So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God”** (1 John 3:10).

Can you know for certain that God has forgiven your sins forever? If so, how can you be certain? The point of this chapter is:

God wants His people to know for certain they are forgiven forever and this is proven by their new love for God and people.

### **God wants His people to know for certain they are forgiven forever**

The above Bible verse makes it clear God wants you to “*know you have eternal life.*” You learned in the previous chapters that you receive “*eternal life*” when you “*believe in the name of the Son of God*” (1 John 5:13) and who He is. And if you have “*eternal life*” from God then you have eternal forgiveness as well.

What is the most important question you need to answer in this life? It is where you will be sent in the next life. Not being certain of your eternal destination will gnaw on your mind your whole life. Especially when you are about to die, then you will know this is the most important question of your life. God wants you to settle the question of where you will spend eternity once and for all.

Notice that God wants you to “*know*” now that you “*have eternal life*” and forgiveness. Some think it is impossible to be certain you are forgiven forever. Others think it is arrogant to claim you are certain you have eternal

life and forgiveness. Contrary to all of these beliefs, the Apostle John said, “*I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life*” (1 John 5:13).

Why wouldn't God want you to know your relationship with Him is eternally secure? Wouldn't you as a father or mother want your kids to know that you will love them no matter what? Why would God want you to be certain of your forgiveness and eternal life? Because God wants you to be secure in His love for you. Otherwise you will continue to live in an unhealthy fear of Him, living as if you need to keep earning His forgiveness. That is not the relationship God wants to have with you.

The Bible says, “*Perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love*” (1 John 4:18). God does not want His children to be afraid of anything, including “*punishment*” or losing your relationship with Him. Like any good Father, God wants you to be motivated to love and serve Him out of gratitude for your forever forgiveness instead of fear or guilt. <sup>1</sup> This is why God wants you to “*know you have eternal life.*”

If God wants you to “*know you have eternal life,*” then there must be ways to determine this. And if there are ways to determine if you are a Christian, then we can also have some idea if others are Christians. Of course we are not God and we do not perfectly know the condition of people's hearts. But so much unnecessary confusion, trouble, division, pain, and wasting time and resources occurs because we falsely assume we or someone else is a Christian.

Because many in the Corinthian church were claiming to be Christians but not living like it, the Apostle Paul wrote them: “*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?*” (2 Cor 13:5 NIV). How do we “*test*” ourselves and others to know who is a real Christian?

Part of the problem is that we want to believe we or others are Christians and we do not evaluate this question objectively. God wants you to be wise about the spiritual state of your soul and that of others so you can respond accordingly. Perhaps you have been trying “*Christian*” things like reading the Bible and going to church to change your life but they are not helping because you are not a Christian. Perhaps you need to first really believe the Good News explained in this study.

Perhaps you have been trying to help a friend who claims they are a Christian. But they do not seem to be changing. This may be because they do not have the power of the Spirit in their life that all Christians have. God wants His people to know for certain they are forgiven forever and this is proven by their new love for God and people.



## Your forgiveness is proven by the indwelling of God's Spirit

Fortunately, the Bible gives us some clear proofs of someone being a Christian.

First, it is important to understand that becoming a Christian is not merely making a decision. It is not choosing to change religions or join a group. It is not choosing to go to certain meetings or to change certain bad habits. Becoming a Christian is not even merely changing your beliefs. You can understand and agree with all the truth necessary to be a Christian and still not be a Christian. Why? Jesus explained: *"I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit"* (John 3:5-7).

As discussed earlier, no one is physically born a Christian. Jesus said that is merely *"being born of water"* which surrounds a baby in the womb and will *"reproduce only human life"* (John 3:5). To *"enter the Kingdom of God . . . You must be born again"* and indwelt by the Holy Spirit."

You read in chapter 1.2 Jesus' famous statement in John 3:16 which says, *"whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* But earlier in John 3:5 Jesus said, *"You must be born again."* These two things must be put together to truly understand how someone becomes a Christian. Everyone who truly trusts God the Son to pay for their sins will also be *"born again"* by God the Spirit. There are no exceptions.

How do you know if you have sincerely believed in Christ to be forgiven forever for your sins? The Spirit of God will indwell you and give you new spiritual life if your faith in Christ is real. Again, becoming a Christian is not just making a decision or changing your life. It is about *God* radically changing your life.

God has given this amazing promise to all believers in Christ:

*I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. (Ezek 36:26-27)*

The invasion of God's Spirit into your spirit will have immediate and obvious effects. The Holy Spirit only and always indwells real Christians and His influence on your life is the proof that you have been forgiven forever by God. The Bible says: *"This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit"* (1 John 4:13 NIV).

What will be the obvious and immediate effects of the Spirit of God indwelling you? Desires to obey God and love people. You will never do these perfectly, especially as a young Christian. But your attitude toward God, sin, and people will be radically and instantly changed. A desire to obey God and love people will immediately become the greatest desires you

have. You might struggle to follow those desires, but they will be there like never before. And those new desires will begin to result in a new lifestyle.

The Bible says: *“The effects of the Holy Spirit controlling our lives are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, meekness, and control over our feelings and actions”* (Gal 5:22-23). These virtues will begin operating in a person’s life when *“the Holy Spirit”* indwells them at the time they truly believe in Christ. If a person claims they are a Christian, but continues to demonstrate a lifestyle of selfishness, depression, fear, harshness, stinginess, arrogance, and a lack of control over their sinful emotions and actions, they may not have the Spirit of God living in them and be a real Christian. Again, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will produce immediate and radical effects on the person’s life.

### **Your forgiveness is proven by your love for God**

Obviously, having God’s Spirit live in you will produce a new love for God. How do we know if we love God? Jesus said, *“If you love me, obey my commandments”* (John 14:15). A vital indication that you have been forgiven for your sins and received the Holy Spirit is a great desire to obey God. This is why the word “disciple” (follower) in the Bible is synonymous with being a Christian. Every real Christian is a follower of the commands of Christ. Therefore, the Bible says: *“Anyone who does not live righteously . . . does not belong to God”* (1 John 3:10).

This does not mean that real Christians will not sin. Earlier in the same letter the Apostle John wrote: *“If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth”* (1 John 1:8). But the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will not allow the Christian to have a lifestyle of sin. A new hatred for sin and love for God will ensure this. It can be helpful to compare your new desires to those you had before trusting in Christ. Also, compare your desires to those you know that do not have Christ in their life. If Christ is in you, you will recognize a new and radical hatred for sin and desire to obey God. More specifically, real Christians have a burning desire to please God and will be willing to make sacrifices to obey God even when it is difficult.

Another important evidence that you are a Christian is that you love God’s word. People who say they are a Christian but do not have much interest in reading, studying, or learning about the Bible probably do not have the Spirit of God in them. The Holy Spirit will draw a real Christian to God’s word and give them a craving for it.

Another important sign of loving God is giving money. If a person claims to be a Christian but has no desire to give generously to the financial needs of a local church, then they may not be a Christian. Jesus said, *“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God*

and money” (Matt 6:24). Being stingy with your money is evidence that Jesus is not your master, nor your Savior.

### **Your forgiveness is proven by your love for others**

A born again Christian will not only love God and crave His word, but will also love people. Our text says, “*Anyone who . . . does not love other believers does not belong to God*” (1 John 3:10). The Holy Spirit will give you a new desire and power to want what is best for others and to seek to serve them. The Bible says: “*If we love our Christian brothers and sisters, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead*” (1 John 3:14).

Before people become Christians they think primarily of themselves and how they can be happy. But when the Spirit of God comes to live in them, they begin to primarily think of others and how to help them be happy. They have a new desire to be around Christians. They want to serve Christians. They want to love the Father by loving His children. In fact, loving people becomes the drive of their life. Real Christians want to be around other Christians, attend church services, and other fellowship meetings. A lack of interest in spending time with Christians reveals a heart that does not love Christians and is not indwelt with the Spirit of God.

Another characteristic of false Christians is that they are not committed to meeting with Christians. The Bible says of such people:

*These people left our churches, but they never really belonged with us; otherwise they would have stayed with us. When they left, it proved that they did not belong with us.* (1 John 2:19)

There can be good reasons to leave a particular church, but people who never commit to one should have serious questions about their Christian faith. Remember that love, acceptance, patience, and forgiveness toward other Christians is the clearest evidence someone is a Christian. People who claim they cannot find a church good enough for them are usually lacking these very things. Likewise, if a person has little interest in being with Christians, they would not be able to confidently claim they are a Christian.

A love for people obviously includes forgiving people. Real Christians have the desire and ability to forgive the people that have hurt them. Because God has forgiven them for everything, He expects all Christians to forgive others. The desire and ability to forgive is more evidence that you are a born-again Christian. This is why Jesus said: “*If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins*” (Matt 6:14-15). This is because your refusal to forgive others reveals that you never were a Christian and never had your sins forgiven by God.

Another real test of whether you are a Christian is do you have the ability to love those who do not love you, to forgive those who will not

forgive you, and to be kind and compassionate toward those who hate you. Jesus taught:

*“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.*

*If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matt 5:43-48)*

A real Christian will have an unconditional love for those who do not love them. Only such a love proves that you are “*true children of your Father in heaven.*”

Finally, the Holy Spirit will give you a new love for those who are not Christians. You will greatly desire for them to have the peace and forgiveness you have through trusting in Jesus Christ.

The Bible says: “*Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God*” (Matt 3:8). To repent is to change your mind and life to hate sin and love God. This is the work the Holy Spirit does when we are “*born again*” and indwelled by Him. You can know your faith in Christ is real and His Spirit is in you if you have new desires to know the Bible, obey the Bible, and love Christians.

The role of good works in Christianity can be confusing. As discussed previously, your good works cannot pay for your sin or earn God’s forgiveness. In other words, before you become a Christian, your good works are worthless. But when God gives you the gift of trusting Christ to pay for your sins, He gives you something else: the Holy Spirit indwelling you. And this will result in good works. And it is these good works that prove you are indwelled with the Holy Spirit and are a real Christian.

The Apostle John wrote: “*I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life*” (1 John 5:13). And, “*Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God*” (1 John 3:10). God wants His people to know for certain they are forgiven forever and this is proven by their new love for God and people.

- ▶ Return to the beginning of this chapter and answer the questions there.
- ▶ The following is a summary of the biblical signs of being a real Christian. Check the ones that you believe are true of you:
  - I have a new and lasting hatred for sin.
  - I have a new and lasting desire to please and obey God.

- I have a new and lasting experience of more “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and control over your feelings and actions*” (Gal 5:22-23).
- I have a new and lasting desire to understand God’s word in Scripture.
- I have a new and lasting desire to generously give my money to God.
- I have a new and lasting desire to spend time with other Christians in church services and other times.
- I have a new and lasting desire and ability to forgive those who have hurt me.
- I have a new and lasting desire and ability to love those who do not love me.
- I have a new and lasting concern for those who do not know Christ.

► Read the next chapter to prepare for your discussion this week.

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<sup>1</sup> For further study on the security of a Christian’s forgiveness see the chapters entitled “Your Dad’s Pardon” in *Christians Essentials* study #3: FAITH.

## Chapter 1.6

# Why Do Some People Abandon Christianity After Believing It?

## *The Truth about False Faith*

Matthew 7:21-23

### Week 3

- After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
- What is false faith? Why is it so deceptive?
  - Where did Jesus say false faith would be especially abundant?
  - How can false faith be detected?

Jesus said:

**“Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'”** (Matt 7:21-23)

These are some of the most sobering words Jesus ever spoke. They warn there will be “*many*” false Christians who may do all kinds of spiritual looking things, but will be evil people according to Christ. Elsewhere Jesus warned that whole “Christian” churches could be full of fake Christians (cf. Rev 3:14-20; 2 Cor 13:5). In this chapter you will learn:

False faith is very deceptive but revealed by a lack of love.

### False faith lacks love

We have demonstrated that the Bible teaches, “*We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ*” (Rom 3:22). But there is “false faith.” This is when people claim to believe in Jesus but really do not. They even think they are Christians but are not.

“False faith” is especially abundant where Christianity is popular and not being persecuted. People will join with Christians for many reasons other than following Christ. Being around loving, moral people is attractive. But as discussed in the previous chapter, it is the fruits of the Holy Spirit that proves that you are a Christian, especially love for God and people.

Jesus illustrated “false faith” in how people respond to the message about forgiveness forever through Jesus Christ in a story about a farmer planting seeds. He explained:

*The seeds on the rocky soil represent those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they believe for a while, then they fall away when they face temptation.*

*The seeds that fell among the thorns represent those who hear the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity.*

*And the seeds that fell on the good soil represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God's word, cling to it, and patiently produce a huge harvest. (Luke 8:13-15)*

The first two people described above do not have a real faith in Christ. Their “false faith” is deceptive because they initially respond to the message about Jesus Christ “*with joy*” and “*believe for a while.*” Perhaps they are attracted to the hope of a new life or the love of Christians. But their inability to obey Christ in difficulties, accept persecution, devotion to “*riches and pleasures,*” and that “*they never grow,*” reveal they have “false faith.” When something bad happens in the life of a false Christian and they abandon Christ, we can think the difficulty ruined their faith. But actually, the trial revealed their lack of real faith in Christ.

It is only the last person in the story above that has “saving faith.” All real Christians will persevere in their love for Christ and “*produce a harvest*” of good deeds. This exposes a great number of professing Christians as false Christians because they do not live very different from non-Christians.

### **False faith can be very deceptive**

“False faith” can be powerful and enable people to do impressive things even in the name of Christ. Jesus said:

*On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'* (Matt 7:22-23).

Notice that Jesus said “*many*” of one particular group will have “false faith.” It is those who place great importance on claiming to speak revelation from God (prophecy), casting out demons, and miracle working. All of these spiritual looking things can be faked or done with the power of the devil. Even when done with the name of Jesus! Jesus warned such people will claim to be Christians and use His name, but will actually be “*false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves*” (Matt 7:15). Not all who practices these things are fake

Christians. But Jesus warned that “*many*” such people are not only faking miracles, but are fake Christians as well.

The great deception of “false faith” is demonstrated by Judas who followed Jesus for several years and performed healings in Christ’s name (cf. Matt 10:7-8), but he rejected Christ and betrayed the Lord.

Another example of “false faith” was Demas, whom the Apostle Paul called one of his “*co-workers*” in ministry (Phm 1:24; cf. Col 4:14). But later Paul wrote, “*Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me*” (2 Tim 4:10). And the Bible says, “*Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you*” (1 John 2:15; cf. Jms 4:4) because you are not a Christian.

We also read of Simon the Magician who, “*believed and was baptized*” when he heard the good news about forgiveness forever through Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12-13). But Simon was more attracted to the miracles than following Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter told him:

*May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God's gift can be bought! You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin. (Acts 8:20-23)*

Even though the text says “*Simon believed and was baptized*” (v. 13), his thirst for power and popularity, dependence on money, and his bondage to bitterness and sin exposed him as a false Christian.

## **Other attributes of false Christians**

Another deceptive characteristic of fake Christians is that they may have a lot of knowledge of the Bible. This makes it seem like they are even mature Christians. But the Bible says:

*While knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes. (1 Cor 8:1-3).*

Knowledge of the Bible may impress you, but it does not necessarily impress God. It is only “*the person who loves God*” with a life of obeying Him, that is recognized by God as truly belonging to Him.

False teaching about Christ can also expose “false faith.” The Bible says: “*Who is a liar? Anyone who says that Jesus is not the Christ. Anyone who denies the Father and the Son is an antichrist*” (1 John 2:22). Many cults such as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses claim to be Christians, but deny that Jesus is God. Other religions claiming to be Christian promote good works as the way to be forgiven for sin. Other false Christian groups claim you must do things that are not required by the Bible, but are merely



human traditions. As a result there are many false Christians in all of these groups.

Legalism and guilt are also common signs of false faith and fake Christians. Legalism is following man-made rules and enforcing obedience with guilt. Cults claiming to be Christian often have a lot of legalism in them. There are even churches that promote a lot of obedience to good things like evangelism and giving money, but motivate people by guilt. These churches often have a high number of false Christians in them. <sup>1</sup>

### **False faith was never saving faith**

It is because of the power of “false faith” that many conclude a real Christian can lose their salvation. But notice that Jesus will tell false Christians “*I never knew you.*” It is not true that such people had a real faith in Christ and then lost it. They “*never*” had a real faith in Christ.

How then do you know if you have a real faith in Christ and “*will enter the Kingdom of Heaven*”? Jesus said, “*Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter*” (Matt 7:21). As discussed in the previous chapter, only those who live a life of loving God and people have a real faith in Jesus. The Bible says, “*If someone claims, ‘I know God,’ but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar*” (1 John 2:4). More specifically, false faith is very deceptive but revealed by a lack of love.

- ▶ Return to the beginning of this chapter and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Make sure to meet with someone this week to discuss Chapters 1.4-1.5 of this study.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on legalism see chapter entitled “Your Dad’s Pardon IV” in *Christian Essentials* study #3: *FAITH*.

## Chapter 1.7

## What is God's First Commandment for the Christian?

*Be baptized*

Acts 2:38

### Week 4

► After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- What is God's first commandment for the Christian?
- What is the biblical purpose of baptism?
- What is the biblical method of baptism? Why is this?
- What common practice in baptism is not found anywhere in Scripture?

**“Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to show that you have received forgiveness for your sins.”** (Acts 2:38)

God wants you to be baptized.

We have learned that a desire to obey God is a primary proof that you are a real Christian. The first commandment that your Father gives you is to be baptized. If you refuse this it is likely you are not really a Christian.

The Apostle Peter instructed the people: *“Be baptized.”* What is baptism? Baptism is the Christian practice of being immersed in water as a symbol of your new relationship with the Father. Not only did the Apostle Peter instruct Christians to be baptized, but Jesus Himself commanded it when He told Christians to be *“baptizing”* others (cf. Matt 28:19). As an example, Jesus Himself was baptized (cf. Matt 3:13-15). Accordingly, many NT texts assume all Christians are baptized (cf. Rom 6:2-4; Gal 3:26-27; Col 2:12; 1 Pet 3:21). Therefore, baptism is God's first commandment for a new Christian to obey.

### The purpose of baptism

What is the purpose of baptism? Baptism is the outward expression of your inward commitment to faith in Jesus Christ. If you are not willing to obey Christ's command to be baptized, it is doubtful that you have truly believed in Him as your Savior and Lord. Water baptism is the biblical way in which people profess saving faith in Christ. This is why water baptism is so closely tied to salvation in the NT. Accordingly, when the Apostle Peter is asked by a crowd what they should do to be saved he replied, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the*

*forgiveness of your sins*” (Acts 2:38; cf. 1 Pet 3:21; cf. Gal 3:26-27; Col 2:12). In other words, the way that the "sinner's prayer" often functions in American Christianity is how water baptism functioned in the early Church. This is why for the vast majority of Christian history, baptism has been regarded as the moment someone is saved.

Of course, the act of baptism does not earn the forgiveness of your sins or make you a Christian. As discussed throughout this study, no good deed makes you a Christian. Only trusting the good news about forgiveness forever through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ makes you a Christian. Accordingly, the Apostle Paul wrote: “*Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News*” (1 Cor 1:17). You can be certain that Christ sent the Apostle to do everything necessary for the salvation of people. This is why Christ did not send him to baptize people, because this is not required to have complete forgiveness forever through faith in Christ. However, obeying Christ in baptism is a demonstration to yourself and others of your trust in Jesus Christ.

This is why the Bible does not teach infant baptism. Infants cannot exercise faith in Christ in any meaningful way. While several good Christians baptize infants, there are no examples of this in the Bible. All baptisms described in Scripture involved people who were old enough to sincerely believe in Jesus. For example, the Bible says: “*Those who believed what Peter said were baptized*” (Acts 2:41). Likewise, “*everyone in*” the “*household*” of the jailer in Philippi “*were immediately baptized . . . because they all believed in God*” (Acts 16:33-34). Therefore, infant baptism is not mentioned in the Bible.

## **The method of baptism**

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water. The Greek word for baptism (*baptisma*) used in the Bible means “immersion.” Accordingly, biblical descriptions of baptisms imply immersion. The description of Jesus’ baptism is that He was “*baptized in the Jordan River*” and that afterwards “*Jesus came up out of the water*” (Matt 3:6, 16 cf. Acts 8:38-39) clearly implying He was immersed in the water.

Why is immersion important? Because it symbolizes several important things. First, being immersed under the water symbolizes how you were under the wrath of God before your trust in Christ, just as people were during the world wide flood in Noah’s day (cf. Gen 6:17). Secondly, immersion is a reminder of your being spiritually dead because of your unforgiven sins. In fact, if you were left under the water you would die.

Being raised out of the water symbolizes your new life in Christ (cf. Rom 6:2-4; Col 2:12). Coming up out of the water also reflects your sins being washed away (cf. Acts 22:16; Tit 3:5). Water baptism also symbolizes being born again by the Spirit, just as you were physically immersed in your mother’s water sack in her womb (cf. John 3:3-8).

What are other biblical attributes of Christian baptism? First, many baptisms in the Bible were rather private affairs with only a few Christians witnessing it (cf. Acts 8:34-38; 9:17-18; 10:24-48; 16:13-15; 16:29-34). Therefore, it would seem the primary purpose of baptism is for God to see your act of love and obedience to Him, not necessarily others. Although your baptism can certainly be a great encouragement to others.

Also, any Christian friend can baptize you. The command of Jesus for all Christians is: “*go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*” (Matt 28:19). It does not need to be a Pastor or church leader who baptizes you.

Thirdly, baptisms in the Bible occurred soon after the person trusted Christ. Again: “*Those who believed what Peter said were baptized*” (Acts 2:41). If you have trusted Christ to be your Savior and Lord, seek to be baptized as soon as possible. Steps for water baptism include:

- 1) Decide which Christian will baptize you. Perhaps it will be the one who led you through this study to believe in Christ.
  - 2) Determine a safe place to be immersed. Perhaps the person who led you through this study knows a place. Otherwise, a pond, lake, river, or even a bathtub in someone’s home will work.
  - 3) Wear clothes that will remain modest after being immersed.
  - 4) At the baptism, your baptizer should ask you a few questions to help you publicly confess your faith in Christ. For example:
    - Baptizer: “What must you believe about yourself to be a Christian?”
    - Answer: “I have broken God’s laws and deserve His punishment.”
    - Baptizer: “What must you believe about Christ to be a Christian?”
    - Answer: “He died for my sins, taking God’s punishment for me.”
    - Baptizer: “Why do you want to be baptized today?”
    - Answer: “To demonstrate my faith in Christ as my Lord and Savior.”
  - 5) At this point, the baptizer should say: “Because you have confessed your faith in Christ, I baptized you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (cf. Matt 28:19).
  - 6) Then the baptizer should carefully and completely dunk you in the water and help you come up out of the water.
  - 7) The baptizer should lead a prayer for your new Christian life.
- ▶ Return to the beginning of this chapter and answer the questions there.
  - ▶ Read the next chapter before your group discussion this week.

## Chapter 1.8

**Where Do I Go From Here?***Pursuing Authentic Christianity*

Acts 2:42-47

**Week 4**

- After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
- What are at least four practices God wants you to commit to?
  - Why is it important to find and join a local church?
  - What is the most important quality of a church to look for? Why?
  - Why does God want you to commit to small groups of Christians?
  - How can you help others to become Christians?

**What does God want you to commit to?**

**Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day--about 3,000 in all.**

**All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. . . .**

**And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.**

**They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity--all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people.**

**And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. (Acts 2:41-47)**

After the first Christians were baptized, the Church historian Luke records that “*all the believers devoted themselves*” to four things. These commitments were 1) listening to and following “*the apostles' teaching,*” 2) “*fellowship,*” 3) “*sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper),*” and 4) “*prayer.*” They can all seem overwhelming at first, and they will require a great deal of effort. But the born again Christian has been indwelt with the Holy Spirit and will greatly desire to do these very things. And God does not want you to do them alone, but together with Christian friends in a biblical local church like New Life.

The first Christians “*devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.*” That teaching is recorded in the New Testament (NT). If you do not own a Bible, you need to purchase one. We recommend the *New Living Translation*

used in this study. It even comes in a version designed for new believers. You can obtain one from the New Life Resource Center located in the front foyer of the church.

We would also suggest you read the New Testament before reading the Old Testament. It applies more to the Christian's life. However, you will find the Psalms and Proverbs in the Old Testament very helpful as well.

You should read the Bible every day. As you do, you will experience God speaking to you through His written words. And you will notice significant spiritual growth. As you read the Bible, write down questions you can ask the friend who took you through this study or a New Life Pastor.

Do not simply read the Bible. When you encounter commands for the Christian, do your best to immediately apply them to your life. The Bible says, "*Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves*" (James 1:22). When the first Christians "*devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching,*" they were not just devoted to listening to the Apostles' teaching, but obeying it as well.

The first Christians "*devoted themselves . . . to fellowship.*" The original Greek word used here is *koinōnia*. It means to share your life with others. The first Christians "*met in homes . . . and shared their meals with great joy and generosity.*" In fact, they "*shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.*" That's sharing your life!

There is no doubt that the first Christians considered one another their best, closest, and most trusted friends. And friendship is the best one-word definition of biblical fellowship. This is why New Life Community Church defines Authentic Christianity as: "Sacrificially and joyfully serving Christ with your best friends to glorify God."

There are over 50 "one another" commands in the NT telling Christians to love one another, accept one another, encourage one another, serve one another, teach and counsel one another, and meet with one another. Why is this? Because your greatest purpose as a Christian is to glorify God by enjoying His love for you and giving His love to others. And you will learn and give love the best in Christian fellowship. When you become a Christian you get a new Father in Heaven. You also get a new family on Earth. This is why throughout the NT Christians are called beloved brothers and sisters. Your Father wants you to love, serve, accept, and encourage other Christians as if they are your beloved siblings.

The first Christians "*devoted themselves . . . to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper).*" This refers to an informal ceremony Jesus instituted for you to remember what He did for you on the cross. In Matthew we read:

*As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body."*

*And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, "Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many. Mark my words--I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom." (Matt 26:26-29)*

Jesus wants you to frequently participate in this ceremony involving the symbols of the body and blood of Christ in order to celebrate His sacrifice for you and to be reminded of His return to establish His eternal kingdom on Earth.

Finally, the first Christians "*devoted themselves . . . to prayer*" and were "*praising God.*" Prayer is simply talking to God. As a Christian, you now have the amazing privilege of being able to talk to God anytime you want, and about anything you want. The Bible says:

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7)*

We see that there are two types of prayer -- prayers of thanksgiving, and those of requests. Both are very important and help you to trust God with your difficulties and have a God-centered perspective in your life.

### **How can you keep these commitments?**

Being devoted to "*Sacrificially and joyfully serving Christ with your best friends to glorify God*" is a challenging commitment. And this Authentic Christianity is impossible to do alone or just by attending a Sunday service. This is why the early Christians, "*worshiped together at the Temple each day*" and "*met in homes*" regularly. They spent a lot of time together! The large gathering at the temple soon became a Sunday church service in the early Church. The meetings in homes reflect the practice of small groups. Like the first Christians, it is important for you to be committed to both.

The first believers were devoted to hearing the Apostles teach the Bible. Today, God provides Pastors in the local church for the same purpose. God never intended for you to learn His word alone. The Bible says:

*Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. (Eph 4:11-13)*

Why did the Lord give “pastors and teachers” to the local church? To help you grow spiritually. Their ministries “build up” people in “the church” and will help you serve God and “be mature in the Lord.” They will also protect you from harmful false teachings about the Bible.

The most important attribute of a church is not its size or location or even what programs they offer. None of these things matter to God as much as whether the teaching and character of the Pastors is biblical. You should have the same priority when choosing a church. You are looking for Pastors who earn your trust and respect. This is because God wants you to follow and serve them. The Bible says:

*Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit. (Heb 13:17)*

All of this is why you should personally know those who are teaching you. The Apostle Paul told his friend Timothy: “You must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you” (2 Tim 3:13-14). We would encourage you to meet personally with a Pastor at New Life and tell them about your new faith. A New Life friend can help you do this.

We described above that God wants you to be committed to sharing your life with others and having close Christian friends. This will probably not happen by just going to church every Sunday. You need to be committed to some small groups in order to experience the friendships, fellowship, and family God wants you to.

There are two kinds of small groups at New Life. Barnabas Groups are usually 3-4 people of the same gender and are much like the meetings you have had with your friend going through the FORGIVENESS study. They are named after the man in the NT who helped the Apostle Paul grow in his faith and was called “the son of encouragement” or Barnabas (cf. Acts 4:36). These small groups are for the purpose of helping you grow as a Christian through studying, discussing, and praying through the Bible together. More specifically, New Life’s Barnabas Groups use the *Christian Essentials* studies for this purpose.

You are already completing study #1: *FORGIVENESS*. Study #2: *FOUNDATIONS* covers several necessary beliefs and commitments to enable you to grow in your Christian life. Study #3: *FAITH* helps you understand and trust the wonderful promises of God for your life. Study #4: *FREEDOM* teaches you how to “let God transform you into a new



*person by changing the way you think*" (Rom 12:2). As a result you will overcome spiritual struggles in your life and experience the power of the Spirit more consistently. Study #5: *FRUIT* explains the seven commitments God is wanting you to make for the rest of your life. Finally, Study #6: *FAMILIES* helps you understand Christian perspectives and principles for a happy marriage and effective parenting. We hope you will join a Barnabas Group at New Life and complete all of the *Christian Essential* studies.

A second type of small group at New Life is L.I.F.E. Groups. The acronym stands for Love, Intercession, Friendship, and Equipping. As we noted above there are over 50 commands in the NT for Christians to love, serve, and befriend one another. This is difficult to do during the Sunday service. So New Life is committed to meeting at least every other week in homes. Intercession, or prayer, is an important part of these meetings. So is the friendships that you will gain through your L.I.F.E. group. Finally, there will be biblical teaching and discussion led by the L.I.F.E. Group leaders.

### **Why keep these commitments?**

The Bible says the first local church was, "*enjoying the goodwill of all the people [in the city]. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved*" and becoming Christians (Acts 2:46-47). One of the reasons non-Christians were attracted to the first Christians was they were devoted to the Authentic Christianity described above. Their love for one another and others attracted people to Jesus Christ. Jesus said: "*Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples*" (John 13:35).

Also, the first Christians were telling others the Good News about forgiveness through trust in Christ. A few chapters later in the Book of Acts we read: "*The believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went*" (8:4). There are few privileges and pleasures greater than being used by God to help someone become a Christian and receive eternal life.

However, telling others about your relationship with Christ can be a little intimidating. Therefore, it is important to remember God's part and your part in the conversion process. God's part is to convince people they are sinners and need Christ, and to have a heart ready to trust Christ (cf. John 6:44, 65; 16:7-8; 1 Cor 2:14; Acts 16:14). God does the really hard part of people becoming Christians. This was true in your life as well.

Your part is to be an ambassador for Christ through 1) Loving non-Christians, 2) being holy, 3) telling them your personal story (testimony) about how you became a Christian, and 4) explaining the Gospel to them.

First, understand that Jesus wants to include you in one of the most important tasks occurring on Earth. This is the task of finding your lost

brothers and sisters in Christ and helping them become Christians: “*He gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ’s ambassadors. God is making his appeal through us*” (2 Cor 5:19-20 DEV).

The first thing to do is to start praying for the people in your life who are not Christians. Remember, God has to work in their life just like He did for you, before the message about Christ will be effective.

Then, let people meet Christ through you! This happens when you show them Christ’s love in you. Jesus said: “*Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father*” (Matt 5:16).

Also, to be an ambassador for Christ, you need to be holy like Christ. The Bible says, “*Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord [in you]*” (Heb 12:14 NIV). You cannot practice the same sins as others and then expect them to listen to you about how Christ will change their life.

Hopefully, the people who know you the best will notice the changes that have occurred in you because God the Spirit now lives in you. You must understand the difficult fact that your moral light, love, and holiness will attract some and repel others. The Apostle Paul put it this way:

*Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume.* (2 Cor 2:14-16)

You must be willing to “stink” to those who hate Christ, in order to attract those who are seeking Him. Jesus Himself experienced this and said: “*All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed*” (John 3:20). But those whom God has convicted of their sin and need for forgiveness will be drawn to Jesus Christ in you.

A powerful way to begin talking to others about your new relationship with Christ is to explain your “testimony.” This is the brief story of 1) what your life was like before becoming a Christian, 2) how you became a Christian, and 3) how Christ has changed your life.

Finally, have the same conviction of Paul who wrote: “*I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes*” (Rom 1:16). There is supernatural “power” in the Gospel to change the life and eternity of others. And God wants you to communicate it. Go through this study with them. Or learn the “Cross Diagram” in chapter 1.4 so you can explain the Gospel clearly.

- ▶ Return to the beginning of this chapter and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Meet this week with your group to discuss chapters 1.7-1.8 of this study.
- ▶ Complete the “Commitments” on the next page before your meeting.

## My Commitments

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

You have learned many things in this study. The most important is how to obtain forgiveness forever from God through faith in Christ. If you have become a Christian through this study, there are now some commitments God wants you to make that will bless your life while outwardly demonstrating your new faith.

We would encourage you to complete the questions and tasks below in order to evaluate your next steps as a Christian. All of these commitments can seem like a lot at first. But every one of them will be a great blessing to your life and you have Christian friends who will help you. Please check off the commitments you have made, or record your plan for completing them. Then meet with a Pastor at New Life to discuss them.

| ✓ | My Commitments   | Notes/Plans  |
|---|--|--|
|   | I have committed my faith to Jesus Christ, trusting Him to pay the penalty for my sins and be the Lord of my life. |  |
|   | I have been baptized as a believer in Jesus Christ.  |  |
|   | I will commit to attending New Life Community Church on Sundays.   |  |
|   | I will commit to joining a Barnabas Group and continuing the <i>Christian Essentials</i> studies.                  |  |
|   | I will commit to reading & praying over a portion of the NT every day.   |  |
|   | I will meet with a New Life Pastor to get to know them and let them know me.                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Please email a request to meet with a New Life Pastor to <a href="mailto:office@newlifecr.com">office@newlifecr.com</a></li> <li>- Bring a friend from New Life if possible.</li> <li>- Bring this sheet of commitments as well.</li> </ul> |
|   | I will commit to praying for family and friends who do not believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.       | Please list some people you would like to start praying for:   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>I commit to developing my testimony to share how I became a Christian</p> | <p>Please briefly describe the 3 points below:</p> <p>What was your life like before becoming a Christian?</p> <p>How did you become a Christian?</p> <p>What is different in your life because you are a Christian?</p> |
|--|--|

## Appendix A

**“P.O.W.E.R. Plan” for Discussion Group**≈ 80 minutes

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**Praise** for your Dad’s character and blessings (≈5 minutes):

- What do you want to thank your Dad for this week? How has your Dad answered your prayers?
- Take turns thanking Him for these things now.

**Openness** about any negative emotions (≈15 min.):

- Are there bad emotions you have been struggling with this week including anger, worry, discouragement, or lust?
- If so, what were you believing that made you feel that way?
- What would be truth from Jesus that would set you free from these feelings?

**Word** from your Dad (≈45 min.):

- Ask one another how consistent and encouraging your God Times have been this week.
- Take turns answering the questions at the beginning and end of the chapters assigned this week in the *Christian Essentials* study.
- What did you learn from the Projects you were assigned this week?
- Recite your verses for this week. A list can be found in Appendix B.

**Entreaties** and prayer for yourself and others (≈10 min.):

- What are 2-3 specific things you are asking, seeking, and knocking for God to do in your life right now?
- What family and friends can you pray Eph 3:14-19 for?
- Who do you know that needs Christ in their life and you can pray for?
- Take turns praying for each other.

**Resolutions** to your Dad (≈5 min.):

- Are there any actions or commitments you want to pursue this week?
- Is there anything you would like your group to hold you accountable to this week?
- How did you do with any commitments last week?

## Appendix B

**Memory Verses for *FORGIVENESS* Study**

| Reference     | Verse   |
|---------------|---|
| John 14:6     | I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.   |
| John 3:16, 18 | God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. . . . But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son.  |
| Rom 3:23      | Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.  |
| Rom 3:20      | No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.   |
| Rom 10:8-9    | If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.   |
| 1 John 5:13   | I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.   |
| 1 John 3:10   | So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God.  |
| Matt 7:21-23  | Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.' |
| Acts 2:38     | Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to show that you have received forgiveness for your sins.  |

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Acts 2:42 | All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. |
|-----------|--|