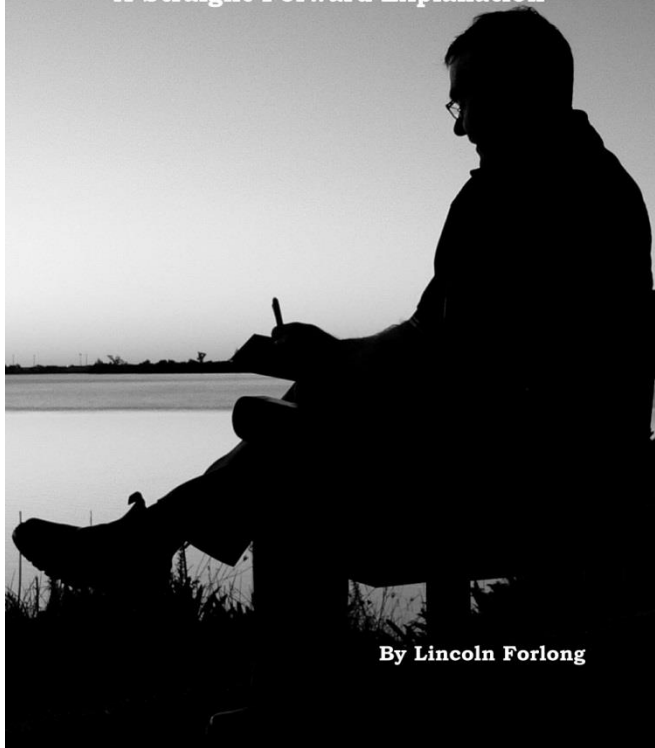


What is a Christian?

A Straight Forward Explanation



By Lincoln Forlong

What is a Christian?

Christianity - you cannot inherit it from others, you cannot buy it, and you cannot earn it! You cannot negotiate a deal that is convenient for you and satisfying to God. You cannot bluff your way into God's family and you can't sweet talk God into giving you a break.

Many think they are Christians because they claim to believe in Jesus, or they attend church. Some hang their hope on a 'decision' they made, or a 'prayer' they prayed at a church service.

Possibly, they grew up in a Christian family, attending Sunday School, or some other Christian run program. Some say that they have always believed the Bible and God. They may have been christened, confirmed, or baptised into a church organisation as a child. They console themselves with the idea of their childhood Christian influence being sufficient to carry them for the rest of their lives. Possibly their name appears on a church membership list somewhere.

*You cannot negotiate a deal that
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It's even possible for such people to grow well into adult life, attending church services, and continuing in Christian practices learned as a child, yet without any authentic relationship with God.

Before we can appreciate what it means to become a Christian, a believer in Jesus Christ, we need to first understand what God says prevents us being a Christian from birth.

"I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me."

(Romans 10:20)

The Unpopular News!

God informs us in no uncertain terms, that we ...*all have sinned and fall short of the glory (perfection) of God* (Romans 3:23). King David, from Old Testament Bible times, confessed that: *Surely I was sinful at birth* (Psalms 51:5). From our earliest days we all sin and have disobedience in our hearts. *All wrongdoing is sin* (1 John 5:17a), and we all do plenty of wrong stuff. There isn't a single person able to pass the "Good Person Test"

(You can take the test by going online to www.areyouagoodperson.org).

I understand that this is a humbling realisation, especially when the world, and possibly your own heart, are telling you the opposite.

Both personal and world history tells us that: *There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins* (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Until we take ownership of our sinfulness, we will resist God and His Word at every point. An attitude of spiritual belligerence (to be hostile against) will permeate every thought, every belief, every partial commitment we make, as we draw closer to a right understanding of God.

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God tells us that we are *...spiritually dead because of your disobedience and sins* (Ephesians 2:1 GNB). God, being sinlessly holy, requires justice for our sin, and that justice requires the death penalty.

The Bible tells us that the *...soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son... the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him* (Ezekiel 18:20). Our personal sin earns wages, and the most accurate payment for our sin is death (Romans 3:23). This death penalty is not transferable, nor is it able to be shared with anyone else, nor can it be erased by a fellow sinner.

Our unbelief in Jesus Christ keeps us in a state of guilt before God: *...whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son* (John 3:18).

We need to agree with God that *...everyone who sins is a slave to sin* (John 8:34), accepting that *...because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath,*

*Until we take ownership of our
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when his righteous judgment will be revealed
(Romans 2:5).

I realise that accepting this is not comforting. It leaves us with a fearful expectation that one day we shall stand before God condemned, guilty as charged, and without any excuse or redeeming qualities.

Believe God when He says that *...the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur [Hell]* (Revelation 21:8).

Did you notice in Revelation 21:8, there is no distinction between the severities of sin. We humans tend to categorise sin, ranking it by its degree, in an attempt to present ourselves being better than what we really are. To God, the liar is as guilty as the murderer. The unbeliever is as guilty as those who practice magic arts. Sin is sin, no matter how you cut it. All sin is worthy of eternal judgement (wrath) - death.

Understanding this is essential if we expect to know God as He wants to be known.

Being born a sinner myself, I know how we avoid coming to grips with this terrible reality. We find ourselves trapped by sin, yet we live in denial of it.

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We go to extraordinary lengths, attempting to find any belief, any alternative, anything that will offer hope apart from acknowledging our true standing as a sinner before a holy God.

However, like you, I'm forced to deal with the reality of my life. I prove God to be truthful; I am a guilty sinner awaiting judgement.

Finding ourselves in this incurable predicament, spiritually bankrupt (Matthew 5:3), without God and without hope (Ephesians 2:12), let's consider God's solution to our dilemma.

*"Come to me, all you who are
weary and burdened, and I
will give you rest.
(Matthew 11:28)*

The Good News!

The Bible explains 3 non-negotiable parts to God's solution for us. This is what we call becoming a Christian, a believer in Jesus Christ:

- 1. To be a Christian we must agree with God about who Jesus Christ is.**

Jesus Christ is God in human flesh, fully God while being fully human at the same time.

The Bible says that *...in Christ all the fullness of the Deity (God) lives in bodily form* (Colossians 2:9). The Bible also says that *...our great God and Saviour, [is] Jesus Christ* (Titus 2:13). Again, Paul told the People of Philippi that Jesus Christ is *...in very nature God...* (Philippians 2:6-7).

Jesus is not simply a good man who inspired others. Nor is he a religious guru who convinced others to His way of thinking. He didn't come to fight for political reform or environmental protection. No, Jesus tells us Himself, *"I and (God) the Father are one"* (John 10:30) and *if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins* (John 8:24). The sin

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of choosing not to believe who Jesus is, sufficiently qualifies us for spiritual death.

God gives us a more detailed explanation of who Jesus is in Hebrews 1:2-3 *...in these last days He (God) has spoken to us by His Son (Jesus Christ), whom He (God) appointed heir of all things, and through whom He (God) made the universe. The Son (Jesus Christ) is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His (God's) being, sustaining all things by His powerful word.*

Hebrews 1:2-3 details a most compelling truth for the human race; the one true God, who created and maintains all that exists in the cosmos, has made Himself known to mankind through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is God in human flesh

Jesus Christ is the only full and accurate expression of God this world has ever known. God is unashamedly non-negotiable regarding Jesus Christ being His exclusive path to both the knowledge of God and entering into a relationship with Him.

If you want to know God, you must look to His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. There is simply no other way by which you can know God, although you may wish

there were other ways. Others may attempt to convince you of other ways, but the fact is that, God emphatically says there is none. Jesus Himself said, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (John 14:6).

2. To be a Christian we must believe in (trust in, depend upon) Jesus Christ to forgive us of the sin that separates us from God.

Jesus Christ alone was qualified to take our place in receiving our punishment because *He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth* (1 Peter 2:22). No other person has ever been sinless, therefore, no other person qualifies to stand in our place of judgement.

Therefore, belief in Jesus Christ is depending upon the fact that *He* (Jesus Christ) *himself bore our sins in his body on the tree* [The cross]... (1 Peter 2:24). God the Father vented His full justice on His Son, punishing Jesus with our death penalty for our sin. *God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him* (John 3:17), therefore, Jesus is our only Saviour, the only sinless one who has given His life so that we would have the opportunity of escaping judgement.

Believing in Jesus Christ means we abandon all ideas of ever being able to satisfy God's righteous

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requirements. We then grab hold of the fact that Jesus Christ has already paid the price fully for our past, present and future sin by His death on the cross of Calvary. *Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God...* (1 Peter 3:18).

Believing in Jesus Christ means we dependently put our trust in Him who *...was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification* (Romans 4:25). Justification means that we are acquitted from guilt, presented as right before God purely because

*God the Father vented His full
justice on His Son, punishing Jesus
with our death penalty for our sin*

of Jesus death and resurrection, which He did in our place because we could not do it for ourselves. The crucifixion and death we should have suffered, He suffered in our place, carrying the full load of our sin which was placed in his body.

3. To be a Christian we must love Jesus Christ as Lord (Master).

A Christian accepts Jesus words: *If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching* (John 14:23). The man who says, *I know him* (Jesus), *but does not do what He* (Jesus)

commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:4).

The Bible calls this change of attitude toward Jesus "repentance". Repentance means to turn and go in the opposite direction. Therefore, a non-Christian should realise that to believe in Jesus Christ is to change the total direction of your life from living for self, to living for Jesus Christ as master (Lord).

Jesus said: *I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* (Luke 5:32). It's appropriate then, that a Christian *produce fruit* (behaviour) *in keeping with repentance* (Matthew 3:8). Our behaviour is to be the visible evidence that God has genuinely changed the direction of our lives. This is what God means when He says that all people *...must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus* (Acts 20:21).

Jesus' Lordship is what identifies the pretend from the genuine Christians. At the heart of any decision to believe in Jesus Christ, is an open expression of a surrendered life.

The apostle Paul explains: *...if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved* (Romans 10:9). James, the half-brother of Jesus, explained how we can monitor the authenticity of our belief in Jesus by examining how we express faith. He said *...faith by itself,*

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if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:17). Our newly obedient lifestyle is NOT what saves us from our sin, rather, it is what authenticates our belief in Jesus Christ as being genuine.

A person doesn't get to this stage of understanding God just to say a little prayer, using all the right words, then goes out continuing to live the same way they always have.

Jesus declared His Lordship over anyone who genuinely wants to believe in Him by saying: *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me* (Luke 9:23).

Believing in Jesus Christ means daily living in denial of self-perceived rights. It means living daily as if we were actually about to be crucified because of our faith in, and allegiance to, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Lordship is what identifies the
pretend from the genuine
Christians*

The apostle Paul explains the relationship between belief in Jesus Christ and Lordship in these words: *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And*

he died for all, that those who live (Believers) should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). This attitude fuelled the Apostle Paul's confession that: For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21).

Living as a Believer in Jesus Christ does not mean adding Him to your religious beliefs. It does not mean He is your “fire insurance” against eternal judgement while you carry on living life your way. No, Jesus takes over!

Belief in Jesus Christ means self-abandonment and surrender to His control as Lord. As Believers in Jesus Christ we say with the apostle Paul; *If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living (Romans 14:8-9).*

We do not take Jesus for a test drive. We do not have Him on a 90 day trial with right of return. He is not waiting for us to give a performance review of how well He's done at satisfying us.

Belief in Jesus is yielding, a relinquishing of all personal rights to His supreme headship. Jesus takes over as Sovereign Lord. God's Word is clear, anyone considering belief in Jesus should understand that *...with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self,*

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which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24).

- ✚ If you intend to add Jesus to your existing religious beliefs as a safe guard, don't. **He demands exclusivity.**
- ✚ If you intend on passively including Jesus in your existing lifestyle as an add-on, don't. **He demands total domination, not inclusion.**
- ✚ If you are working on assimilating the appearance of belief in Jesus while retaining control of your values, beliefs, and behaviours, don't. **He demands total control as absolute God of your life.**

Belief in Jesus Christ means self-abandonment and surrender to His control as Lord

In a nut shell

A Christian, a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, is someone who recognises their sinfulness along with their impending judgement before a holy God. Acknowledging their total inability to do anything to help themselves, they put trusting faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, believing that His death on the cross was payment for their sins. They surrender their lives, their daily thinking and living in obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord (Master).

*For God did not send his Son
into the world to condemn the
world, but to save the world
through him.*

(John 3:17)

The results of belief in Jesus Christ

The results of belief in Jesus Christ are the following, to mention only a few. These spiritual truths are true of everyone who genuinely puts their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ:

- **God declares us righteous in His sight**

Realise that ...*your sins have been forgiven on account of his (Jesus) name (1 John 2:12).*

Realise that ...*we have now received reconciliation (Romans 5:11).* Reconciliation is the exchanging of our sin for Christ's righteousness. Reconciliation is what turns the sinner from being an enemy of God into one who has God's favour.

Realise that ...*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2).* Believers will never be condemned (judged) for sin.

- **God declares us to be His children**

Realise that ...*"to all who received him (Jesus), to those who believed in his (Jesus) name, he (Jesus) gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).*

Realise that ...*He (God) predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ...* (Ephesians 1:5). The Believer is now a child of God.

- **God indwells us by His Holy Spirit**

Realise that ...*you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit* (Ephesians 1:13). The very moment you believe in Jesus Christ as Lord you receive the permanent indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

- **God grants us eternal life**

Realise that ...*whoever believes in him (Jesus) shall not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16). The very moment you believe in Jesus Christ as Lord you receive the permanent, irreversible gift of eternal life.

- **God makes us new**

Realise that ...*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Whatever we were before we put faith in Jesus as Lord is gone, dead. In Jesus Christ, God sees and treats us as new people.

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Realise that ...*He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5b).* In God's sight, we are now viewed as clean people, renewed by the Holy Spirit and acceptable.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
(2 Corinthians 5:17)*

If you realise you need the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, I encourage you to talk with God. Don't wait:

- **Confess and repent** of your sin. Turn to living for Jesus Christ as your Lord (master).
- **Believe in Jesus Christ alone** as the one who paid for your sin, buying your forgiveness with His life on the cross of Calvary. Believe that Jesus Christ took your place on the cross.
- **Believe that you**, with your old way of life, died with Jesus on the cross of Calvary and that God is giving you a new life, eternal life, in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, or want more help, may I suggest you speak with the Christian friend who gave you this booklet.

Read God's Word daily and pray. Begin attending a Bible teaching church or Home Group.

I would love to hear from you if you would like to share your story, or, if you have something I can help you with.

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All Bible verses are highlighted in *Italic text*.

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