

The Know-So Christian

by

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"I know whom I have believed"

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Chapter 3 -

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

A friend of mine once said that prior to his conversion he **supposed** that he had been a Christian always. "For," said he, "I presumed that everyone who was not a Jew was a Christian."

Another friend of mine said that prior to his conversion he supposed that he was a Christian because he had been "brought up that way."

Like Joseph and Mary, who, at the time JESUS was twelve years old, travelled a whole day's journey homeward, "supposing him to have been with them," even so many today have travelled far, but have arrived nowhere spiritually, because they are merely supposing that they are Christians.

It is astonishing how trivial and superficial is the basis for most of these suppositions. It is our definite purpose in this chapter to show exactly how one may become a Christian. We intend to make the way so plain that it will be impossible for anyone, old or young, educated or ignorant, to fail to see clearly the one thing necessary for salvation.

It seems to me that the best method to adopt is to show what "becoming a Christian" does **not** mean; and then with the many obstacles and false notions set aside or laid low and slain, like enemies of war, we shall be free to discuss the "one thing needful."

1. To become a Christian Does not Mean to Join a Church.

While it is possible for one to become a Christian at the moment of joining a church, actual observation shows that there are so many church members who do not give evidence of Christianity, that one wonders how they can dare to **keep their names on the church roll!**

Certain denominations, which claim for themselves that they are the **only true church** of CHRIST on earth (and which offer abundant "proof," historical and ecclesiastical, to show that they are what they claim to be) are perhaps largely to blame for this dangerous notion that "becoming a Christian" and "joining the church" are one and the same thing. This of course tends to produce confusion in the minds of those who want to know how to be saved, and draws

attention away from the one thing that is required.

I firmly believe, however, that every Christian should become a member of some church. His light should shine out **through the windows of the church!**

Of course when we study the Word of GOD and understand that the **church** is the **Body of CHRIST**, of which He is the Head, and that all Christians are members of that Body, whether they be members of a local church or not, then we can truly say that joining the CHURCH (The Body of CHRIST) is the same as "becoming a Christian": "**For as we have any members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another**" (Romans 12:4-5) and "**But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ**" (I Corinthians 12:11-12). For in this case we have become united to CHRIST Himself, the true HEAD of the Church!

2. To Become a Christian Does not Mean to "Turn Over a New Leaf"

There is nothing over which we stumble more readily than the fragments of our broken resolutions.

We reform, make new resolves, try to be good, turn over new leaves, start all over again; and again and again determine to "quit our meanness." But in most cases there is heartbreaking failure. The reason for this is evident; these are but our own efforts at self-improvement. But when we become Christian's it is **GOD's** effort upon which we depend. We cease trying to tie fruit on our fruitless trees and we let Him "make the tree good."

Merely turning over a new leaf will never blot out the bad records on the past pages of our lives. Resolving to borrow no more from a bank will not settle for notes which are long past due.

In the historic *Pacific Garden Mission of Chicago*, I once heard an ex-bad man say this: "Friends, I do not stand before you tonight as a reformed thief and drunkard, but I stand before you as a sinner saved by grace!"

If turning over a new leaf makes a man a Christian then how do we account for the many Buddhists and Mohammedans who have reformed and still retain their religious connections? Are they Christians? Can one be a heathen and a Christian at the same time? Is black ever white?

No, dear reader, becoming a Christian does not mean turning over a new leaf. It does mean receiving a new life, and just how this is done I shall make plain in the following pages.

3. Becoming a Christian is Not a Process

A prominent Christian businessman in describing to me the attempted manner of making "Christians" in his community, said, among other things, that children were hurried into church membership at an early age; and that adults were received into the church without any evidence of their having been converted. Then he made this significant statement, "They seem to think

that they become Christians by a process of absorption!"

Becoming a Christian is not a process, but an event; an event that takes place in a moment of time. It is an act of GOD, by which He plants within us a new life, yea, the uncreated life of CHRIST. It is a new birth; and a birth is an event!

4. Salvation is Not Contagious

If Christianity were transmissible from a Christian to a non-Christian by contact, like a contagious disease, all that would be necessary would be to place an ungodly man in a good Christian environment and -- presto -- like rubbing Aladdin's lamp, we should make of him a child of GOD. In this same manner we could transform hogs into sheep; porcupines into turtledoves; and onions into watermelons! Judas had three years of the best environment a man could have, yet he turned out to be a willful traitor, a thief and a suicide.

A bad apple in a barrel of good ones tends to change its environment into its own likeness.

That no man can give salvation to another is evident from the answer of the wise virgins to the foolish, as recorded in the 25th chapter of Matthew. When the lamps of the foolish virgins had gone out, they begged oil from the wise. But the wise said, "**Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you. But go ye rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves.**"

Every man must go straight to GOD for his salvation. He may be able to have his money in his wife's name, but he must have his salvation in JESUS' name! "**But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name**" (John 1:12) and "**Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved**" (Acts 4:12).

5. Not Baptism

Baptism is an external rite administered by men. Regeneration is an internal transformation administered by the HOLY SPIRIT. The former is a **picture** of the latter.

When a man begins the Christian life he begins resurrection life. His new life begins at the earth of the old. "**Baptized into his death, that like as he was raised from the dead even so we also should walk in newness of life.**" See Romans 6:1-6.

The work of the SPIRIT is to baptize us into CHRIST's death, and raise us again unto newness of life. This is regeneration; and occurs at the time of our becoming Christians. Just as the SPIRIT baptizes us into the death of CHRIST and brings us forth into new life, even so the Christian minister baptizes the believer in water to symbolize, or typify, the work of the SPIRIT, and to present a testimony to the world that the one baptized is dead indeed unto sin but alive unto GOD through our Lord JESUS CHRIST.

For one to depend on water baptism for salvation would be folly indeed. It would be about as foolish as for the groom to marry the bride's picture, rather than the bride herself!

Since this is not a treatise on baptism I see no need here to discuss the difference of opinion as to the mode. For if to become a Christian is an internal work of the SPIRIT, then sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, are not efficacious nor necessary in order that we may be saved.

Experience itself should prove that this is so, for we all know of many who have been baptized but who show absolutely no evidence that they really know CHRIST or have been saved from sin. On the other hand, we have found multitudes of men in rescue missions and churches who have indeed "**passed from death unto life**" but who have not as yet been baptized. I, myself, was a Christian for nearly four years prior to baptism, and had led several scores of persons to CHRIST.

6. Not A Passive Belief in GOD

One may believe in a bank and yet never have a cent of money deposited therein. He may believe in a train and yet never ride on one. He may believe in a telephone and never use one, or in a radio and never tune in.

Even so, men may believe in GOD passively, or believe about GOD, and yet never actually trust in Him or be any better for their professed belief.

How many times I receive this answer to my question, when I ask a person whether he is a Christian: "Oh, yes! I believe in GOD, I believe in CHRIST."

But listen, dear friends -- the devils also believe and tremble!

What Is a Christian?

If to become a Christian does not mean to join a church or turn over a new leaf; if it cannot be experienced merely through contact with fellow Christians; and is not baptism nor a passive belief in GOD, what then does it mean? And how can a man become a Christian?

Let me answer from the plain teaching of the Bible.

All believers on CHRIST were called "brethren" and "believers" as well as "disciples." But "believer" was the word used to signify that they had living faith in CHRIST as the Son of GOD, their own Saviour, crucified and risen again from the dead.

In the book of Acts we read, "**Disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.**" Hence, the two words came to be used synonymously, and to mean the same thing. This being so, then a believer on the Lord JESUS is a Christian!

Therefore the thing for us to do to find out exactly how to become a Christian, is to ascertain the true meaning of the word "believe."

In John 3:36 we read, "**He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life!**" In Romans 6:23 we read, "**The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**" From these verses and the one which says, "Disciples were called Christians first at Antioch," we can see readily

that a believer is a Christian, using the word "*disciple*" and "*believer*" interchangeably, and that everlasting life comes as a free gift to the Christian. But again we say, "What does it mean to believe?"

In John 2:24 we read concerning CHRIST, in His attitude toward the fickle populace, that "**He did not commit himself unto them.**" Now, pay most careful attention to the following statement, the word "commit" is an identical word meaning "believe." From this we may gather that to believe on CHRIST means to "commit unto," thus making the manner of becoming a Christian as simple as A B C. And we may say, "He that commits himself into CHRIST's keeping has eternal, everlasting life! and those who so commit themselves have a right to be called Christians.

As in learning to float we simply relax and trust the water to hold us up; even so in being saved, we relax in the arms of CHRIST. We **trust** Him. We **receive** Him as our Saviour and Lord. We let Him do that which we cannot do. We let go -- and let GOD!

I do not feel that I dare close this chapter on "How to become a Christian" without urging my readers (those who are not yet saved) to avoid all delay in making the supreme decision.

A Personal Plea

You know that you need a Saviour! For you have sinned and come short of His glory! (Romans 3:23). And without forgiveness of sins you can never enter Heaven, for Heaven is a holy place! Without CHRIST you are lost! (Luke 19:10). And if you do not believe on Him you are already condemned! (John 3:18-19).

But you also **know** that He is the Saviour you need. He alone can save you from sin (John 8:24). He alone is the way to forgiveness and Heaven (I John 1:9). And in John 14:6, He says, "**I am the way . . . no man cometh unto the Father but by me.**"

And -- listen! **Now** is the time to decide! There is nothing you can do to save yourself. Will you not turn from your sin, or whatever is holding you away from CHRIST, and "**commit yourself to Him**"?

You say, "Yes, I want to; but how? Tell me how!" Again, listen! Do not be troubled about "how." Just tell Him that you don't know "how" and then say to Him, "Oh, CHRIST, I do want to be saved; and I know that there is no other way but to trust in Thee. And now, even though I do not understand all about it, I throw myself upon Thee. I accept Thee as my Saviour! Now! I RECEIVE Thee as my Lord and my GOD!"

And -- hear me, dear reader -- upon the authority of His own word you may claim your salvation. For, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved**" (Acts 16:31).

And you also know that JESUS wants to save you!

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