



What Next?

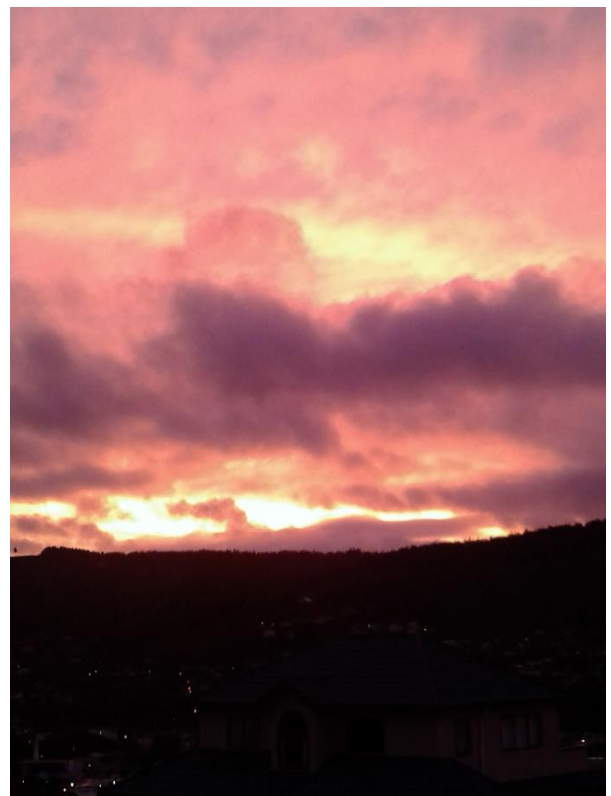
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Ever Been Cheated?

Two articles on the meaning of life, and why we should seriously consider where we are going after our life in this world ceases.

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WHAT NEXT?

What is life really all about?

A young boy was proudly telling his aged grandfather about a recent, very important exam that he had just passed at school. "What will you do next year?" his grandfather asked him. "Why, I'll go back to school and pass my entrance examination to get into university", he replied. "Then what?" asked his grandfather. "Then", the boy replied, "I'll go to university and get a degree." "What next?" asked the old man. "Why then I'll study to be a doctor," the boy answered. "What next?" his grandfather asked again. "Then I'll be a doctor, and get married and buy a home and raise a family," said the boy. "What next?" The boy paused. "Then I guess I'll retire and enjoy my old age until I die." "What next?" asked the wise old man, "What next?" There was a long pause as the boy thought – what next?

What next? Yes, that is a very important question – in fact the most important question we will ever be faced with. What does lie beyond the grave – if anything?

Most young people don't worry too much about this question; "There's a long time to go yet before I have to worry about what lies beyond death." Most middle-aged people are too busy to think deeply about the meaning of life and philosophical questions like that. Many elderly people have the time, and death is much nearer for them, but "I'm too old to change now", they say. And so life's greatest question goes unanswered by the vast majority of people.

In many ways it is surprising that this is so. Many people spend very large sums of money paying into schemes which guarantee them a satisfactory income when they retire. Nobody would spare any expense to hang on to life if at all possible, if they were involved in a serious accident or had a serious illness. Yet a simple question like, "What is life **really** all about anyway?" goes unanswered, and is often completely ignored. To me, the greatest tragedy in the whole of life is for a person to have lived out the whole of their life and never to have found its true meaning and purpose.

If you will read the next few pages, you will see what the Bible has to say about this question. You will read what Jesus Christ said, and why He was born. You will read how you, personally, can find the answers to your life: "Why was I born? What am I here for? What will happen when I die?" Many people think there are no answers to these questions – Jesus says there are! Read on, and see for yourself!

Why am I here?

Many young people today are asking this question: "Why am I here? Where am I heading? Is there a meaning to life?" One of the frightening facets of the theory of evolution is that **maybe** everything did happen by chance, and there is no meaning to life at all: 'we evolved by chance, we die, and that's the end'. No doubt some suicide cases have resulted partly because a person basically believed this; there is no meaning or purpose to life, so why live? But there **is** a meaning and purpose! What is it? Why did

God make us? And why are we here? The Bible gives at least three answers to these questions:

(a) For God's pleasure and love

Revelation 4:11 says, "God is worthy of our worship and honour, because He created everything for His pleasure". God loved you even before you were born! And He wanted you, to be His friend. You might ask, "How could He love me before He made me?" The answer is that God knew what you would be like, and He made you to love Him and be loved by Him. All of the rest of God's creation, apart from Man, cannot communicate with God in the way we can, so He made Man to love, to have friendship with, and to communicate with. He made us for His love and His pleasure. When my wife was expecting our first child, I loved that child even before he/she was born: I wanted that child, and I loved the child. Now that she is born, I still love her and enjoy her. God made us for the same reason!

(b) To give us the freedom to choose

In Joshua 24:14-15, Joshua challenged the Israelites, saying, "You shall love and serve the Lord with all your heart, and not worship other things. But if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, then choose today who you will serve; but as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord." There cannot be true love if there is no choice. This is why we are free to choose who we marry. And this is why God did not make us like robots or machines which have no free will. God has given us choice; we can love and serve Him of our own free will, or we can go our own selfish ways. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will do as I say" (John 15:15). But we have the choice whether or not we love and serve Him. Part of the reason we are here in the world is so that we may exercise this choice: we can choose to follow Christ, or we can, by our actions, ignore Him. Our whole future destiny depends on this choice, as you will read later on.

(c) To live lives that are worthy of God

Ephesians 2:10 says "We were made by God, but because we sinned, we need to be re-made, so that we will live good lives" – lives which are worthy of God, and which help and bless other people. People by nature are sinful and selfish, but this is not what God wants. We are here to love and help one another, and to bring about peace and good in a world that is so full of evil. I know scores of Christians whose lives have been completely changed by Christ – they are no longer drug addicts, immoral, depressed, drunkards, thieves, dishonest or gossips – they now know the joy, excitement and purpose that comes from being a follower of Jesus Christ; their aim now is to do what is right and good, instead of what is wrong and evil.

If you read Ephesians 2:8-10 you will see that we are saved **by God's grace** (His love and favour), which we receive **by faith**, and that as a **RESULT** we are to do what is right and good. Our good works do not save us, nor do they help to save us. Good deeds in our lives come as a **result** of being saved.

So God made us because He loves us, and so that we, of our own choice, might love Him and live good, decent lives. Does this mean that everyone is a Christian, or that all good-living people are Christians?

What is a Christian?

1. Is everyone a Christian?

No! A Muslim who follows Mohammed, an atheist who doesn't believe in Jesus Christ, and a Buddhist who worships Buddha, are obviously not Christians; neither are those who have not yet heard of Christ. But Jesus also said to some people that they were children of the devil – that is, that Satan was their “father” because they followed him, his practices and teachings (John 8:44). We are all **created by God**, but we are not all **children of God**.

2. Is everyone in a Christian country a Christian?

No! When I was in Fiji, I spoke to a Muslim man who honestly believed that everyone in New Zealand was a Christian, because “New Zealand is a Christian country”. And because of the evil in New Zealand he didn't want to become a Christian! But the Bible says, “Everyone who receives Jesus into their life, and believes in His Name, becomes a child of God. And these people become God's children, not because their parents were Christians (or they were born in a ‘Christian’ country), nor because someone wanted them to become a Christian, but because God gave them this right when they accepted Christ” (John 1:12-13). Being born in a hospital does not make you a doctor, and being born in a Christian home or a ‘Christian’ country does not make you a Christian.

3. Is every good church-goer a Christian?

No! A man came to Jesus, and he was a leader in the church of his day, but Jesus told him that he had to be “born again” – that is, his old life of sin and selfishness had to die, and he had to let God re-make his life again: he had to become a new man. Jesus said: “Unless a person is born again (a spiritual re-birth) he cannot enter God's Kingdom” (John 3:3-5).

4. Is every person who lives a good life a Christian?

No! As we saw earlier, our good works and good life follow as a **result** of our becoming a Christian; they do not **make** us a Christian. I can eat, and bark, and live like a dog, but this will never make me a dog; I would have to be born again as a dog.

Only God can make you a Christian, if you will let Him. In a moment we will see what a Christian is, and how you can become a Christian. But first let us answer the question: “If God made us all because He loves us, why aren't we all Christians?” The answer is simply that God has given us a choice: we don't have to love and serve God if we don't want to. But if we go our own way (and all of us have), and if we sin (which all of us have) then we cannot become Christians **until** we do something about the problem of sin which separates us from God.

So there are two types of people in the world: Those who have done nothing about their sin, and those who have asked God's forgiveness for their sin so that He has taken it away, come into their lives and made them Christians. A Christian is one whose sins are all taken away and who has received Jesus into his life, and seeks to follow Him. Let us now see why Jesus came.

Why Jesus came

Jesus said, "The reason that I was born was so that you might have life, and really enjoy it to the full" (John 10:10). If this is so, then why is the world so full of misery, sickness, war, death, and so on? Jesus also answered this question in the same verse referred to above: "Satan, the devil, comes only to steal and kill and destroy the good things in life." The reason, then, is that Satan has tempted us all to do wrong – and most times we have done it! These wrong things (sins) not only affect us, but they also hurt others. Every time I sin, I not only hurt myself, but I hurt God and I hurt other people. If I lie, steal, murder, spread unkind or untrue gossip, or cheat, then obviously other people are affected. This is the basis of the answer to the question: Why do the innocent suffer?

Of course it is necessary that wrong be punished. If we had complete anarchy and lawlessness, where everybody could do whatever they liked without any restrictions, then society as we know it would collapse.

And so God was faced with a problem: He loves us, and does not want to have to punish us, and yet at the same time He must be just. It was for this reason that Jesus was born into this world: He lived a perfect life, and so did not have to be punished for sin. Instead He paid the penalty for our sin: He was nailed to a cross and left to die. The Bible says: "The penalty (or punishment) for sin is everlasting separation from God (spiritual death), but God's gift to us is everlasting life. ... This is the way God showed His great love for us: while we were still sinful, Jesus came into the world and died for our sins!" (Romans 6:23 and 5:8).

We can illustrate this with a couple of examples:

A judge one day was faced with a predicament: the man on trial was a very close friend of his, but was obviously guilty. He could not let him go free just because he was his friend, so what he did was to fine him the appropriate amount, and then, stepping down from the bench the judge offered his friend the amount of money that he had just fined him. Because of justice, the penalty had to be paid, but because he was his friend, he paid the penalty for him. This is exactly what God did for us: God sent His Son Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for your sin and mine.

The second example (which is true) occurred some years ago in the United States where a man was sentenced to death for a certain crime. After lengthy trials and appeals by his lawyers, they finally obtained a pardon for him. But when the pardon was delivered to the condemned man in his cell, he refused to accept it. A special court-case was held to determine what was to be done, and the court decided that if a pardon was refused then

the guilty man must pay the penalty – death. And so the man was executed. In the same way, we do not have to accept the pardon Jesus offers to us – we can reject His offer of forgiveness and turn our back on Him. But if we do, then we will suffer the consequences. The penalty must be paid, and if we reject Christ’s offer to pay it, then we must pay it ourselves. This, then, leads us to the question, “After death – what?”

What lies beyond the grave?

Several people have said to me, “No-one knows what happens after death. After all, no-one has ever come back from the dead, have they?” My answer is: “Yes! Someone has! Jesus Christ rose from the dead and I know that He is alive today because I have experienced Him in my life. And since He has come back from the dead, we should listen to Him!”

When a person dies, their body decays, but their spirit continues on beyond the grave. Because God is perfect, He can only have true friendship with those whose sins are forgiven and taken away. So there are two places a person may go: if they have received Christ into their life, and their sins are taken away, then they will spend eternity with God in Heaven. The Bible does not tell us a great deal about Heaven, but it does tell us that it is an infinitely wonderful place where “God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more death, or sorrow, or crying, or pain; because all these things will have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). Jesus also tells us that He has “Gone to prepare a place for us and will come back again to take us to be with Him, so that where He is, we will be too” (John 14:3). It is a place that is much to be desired; a place that God has prepared for us, and one where He wants us to go.

But if a person has not accepted Jesus Christ into his life, and has not had his sins taken away, then he cannot go to be with God, for there is no sin in Heaven and only God’s children can go there. Such a person will go to an exceedingly terrible place called Hell, where Satan and all the sinful ones will go, where they will be punished for their sin and be cut off from God forever. This is our choice – Heaven, by definition, is a perfect place; there is no sin in Heaven. Therefore, in order to be saved from the consequences for our sin, all sin in our lives must be forgiven and “washed away”. The only alternative is that we have chosen not to go to Heaven and be with the Lord and His people.

Jesus Himself told us that Hell is a place where people will “Weep and wail and grind their teeth” (Matthew 13:42). He was not primarily trying to frighten us, but He did want to tell us the **facts**, and facts are facts whether they are frightening or not!

Because of God’s love for us, He has opened up the way for us to go to Heaven rather than Hell, if we will, but the choice is up to us. See Revelation chapters 21 and 22.

There are two very important questions we must now answer:

(a) **WHY** should I become a Christian? And, if I am satisfied that I should become a Christian, then the next question is:

(b) **HOW** can I become a Christian?

Why should I become a Christian?

There are several reasons why we should choose to become Christians:

1. Because this is the reason that God made us: He made us to have friendship with Him, and to love Him. This is only possible if we become a Christian.
2. In gratitude to Jesus Christ for all that He has done for you in dying to pay the penalty for your sin, and in doing all He can to bring you into a life-giving relationship with God.
3. Because life is meaningless and purposeless until we find Christ and know that there is a wonderful life after death.
4. Because it is the only way we can have peace in our hearts and know true freedom from guilt, when Christ has taken away our sin and washed us clean.
5. Because we can only go to be with God in Heaven if we have become a true Christian. The alternative is to spend eternity without Christ, without joy, and without hope. – and that is hell!
6. Because only by becoming a Christian can we expect to receive God's answers to our prayers, God's help when in difficulty, and His blessing on our lives. If I wrote to the King and asked him for a large sum of money that I needed, I am certain that I would not get it from him. But if I wrote to my father and asked him for the same amount of money, I am sure that he would give it to me. Why the difference? Because one is related to me, and loves me; the other doesn't even know me! It is exactly the same with God: why should God be interested in us if we are not His children and if we never (or hardly ever) can be bothered with Him? But if we are a child of God, then that makes all the difference! He loves us as a true and perfect Father should love His children.

The Christian life is exciting! I wouldn't swop it for anything. It is wonderful to have peace with God, to know one's sins are forgiven, that one day we will be with God in Heaven, to know that you have a loving Heavenly Father who cares for you and watches over you day and night. He helps us in our difficulties and is always willing to lift us above our trials and carry us through the tests of life. However, there is a cost involved in being a Christian, and it would be deceitful not to mention it, for Jesus Himself said we must first count the cost and see if we are **really** willing to follow Him.

In many ways it is not easy to be a Christian: friends may laugh a little; it will cost you time, money and effort; in fact – everything! Jesus not only wants to save you from the penalty for sin, but He also wants to be Lord and Master of your **whole** life. Are you willing to let Him?

How can I become a Christian?

1. We must **believe** that Jesus Christ, God's Son, died for our sins. "God loved the world

so much that He gave His only Son Jesus Christ, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

2. We must **repent** of our sins: that is, we must be truly sorry for all the wrong things we have done, and be prepared, with God's help, to turn from them. This may involve making restitution to someone you have wronged. “Repent, and be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven” Acts 2:38.
3. We must **confess** our sins to God, and ask His forgiveness. This deals with the past. “If we confess our sins we can trust God to forgive our sins and wash us from all our uncleanness” 1 John 1:9.
4. We must **ask** Jesus Christ to come into our lives, by His Spirit, and be our Lord and Saviour. Jesus has risen from the dead and is alive today! He wants to come into our lives and make us God’s children, and give us the power to live for the future. “Everyone who receives Jesus Christ into their lives, and believes in Him becomes a child of God” John 1:12.

If we sincerely do this, then God will receive us as one of His sons or daughters, because Jesus has promised, “Whoever comes to Me, I will never reject” (John 6:37). Do you believe this? If so, you can pray now, and ask God’s forgiveness and ask Christ to come into your life. You might like to make up your own prayer, or you can pray the following prayer. Remember that it is the sincerity of your heart that is important, and God knows this. You can pray many prayers and make many decisions in front of people, but God knows your heart!

*“Lord God, I am truly sorry for all the wrong things that I have done, and I pray that you will forgive me for Christ’s sake, and wash me clean from all sin. Please come into my life **now** and make me a child of God. Please give me your Holy Spirit and help me live for you. I now confess Jesus as my Lord and Saviour, and thank you for all you have done for me. In Jesus Christ’s Name I pray, Amen.”*

If you have done this sincerely, then as you prayed God did take away your sin and has come into your life. God has **promised**, “If we confess our sins, He is reliable and trustworthy and will forgive us and wash us from all sin” (1 John 1:9). John wrote his first letter so that we might **know** that we have everlasting life through God’s Son (1 John 5:11-13). God’s Word also tells us that “If anyone is a Christian, then he is a new person; old things (sin and our sinful way of life) have passed away, and everything has become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

What next?

What are the next steps after becoming a Christian? There are five main things that it is important for a Christian to do, right through life:

1. **Read the Bible:** I suggest that you get a modern translation and read the Gospel of John first. After reading John, read through the rest of the New Testament, in order.
2. **Pray each day:** Thank God for all He has done for you, ask His forgiveness for

everything you may have done wrong that day, and pray for the needs of other people, as well as your own needs.

3. **Go to a good evangelical church** – one where you feel at home, the people are friendly, and the Bible (the Word of God), is really preached. Make Christian friends and seek their help and advice.
 4. **Obey God** whatever He tells you. God may speak to you through His Word, the Bible, or through Christian friends, or during a time of prayer. Always be obedient.
 5. **Be a witness for Jesus.** Tell your friends and others what Christ has done for you. Tell them how they too can become Christians.
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If you would like to tell us that you have come to Christ as a result of reading this article, or if you would like further help or literature, please contact us by email.

Email: caughley@xtra.co.nz

Also see our **Life Training School** www.lifetrainingschool.org

One of our further books is called
“Now I’m a Christian – What Next?”
This is also available on the above website.

Thank you, and God bless you!

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Ever been cheated?

Ever been cheated? I guess you have at some time or other. In the world today there seems to be so much deception and cheating. Sometimes when buying something, people are given short change. And then there's deceptive advertising and deceptive packaging: the product is not as good as it is claimed, or it is much smaller than the outside packet appears to make it. Sometimes the cheating is much more serious: a person thinks they have bought a good and reliable car, only to find out that it has been patched up, has worn bearings, the engine or gearbox will very soon need expensive repairs, etc. While I was in Europe many years ago I read in a newspaper about students from the United States who thought that they were getting cheap charter flights to Europe but when they arrived in Europe and were supposed to collect their return ticket, which they had paid for, they found out that the charter company was either bankrupt or that there was no such address from which to collect their return ticket.

But the most serious deception you will ever come across is this: Many people think that they are Christians, and that when they die they will go to be with God in Heaven, but they have never really become a true Christian, and may not find out until it is too late. Don't you be cheated out of everlasting life by a deception of the devil! Do **you** know what a person must do to become a Christian and have the assurance of eternal life? Many people think they do, but they are wrong – they have been deceived by wrong teaching and wrong ideas, and unless they find out the truth, they will be cheated out of the most wonderful thing that God has promised us – eternal life in Heaven with Him.

Don't get me wrong! I'm not trying to push any particular denomination: I don't mind what church you go to, but I am concerned that you find the true life in Christ. Everything that follows is completely Biblical – these are not my ideas, they are what God says. This is why I have frequently quoted from the Bible, God's Word, and though I have given a simple translation of these verses, in every case I have given the reference so that you can look the verses up in any translation of the Bible that you like, and see that they are true. I have only one aim: to show you what GOD says a Christian is and how you can become a true Christian.

What a Christian is NOT

There are a lot of wrong ideas as to what is a Christian, so let us start by looking at what a Christian is not.

1. Not everyone is a Christian

It is a fairly common idea that everyone is a Christian, "After all, God made us all, and we're all brothers and sisters, aren't we?" people may ask. The answer, however, is No! It is true that God made us all, and so we are all His creatures – His creation – but we are not all His children. Later on we will see what the Bible says a person must do to become a Christian, a child of God, but in the meantime let us look at some examples that will show

us that obviously not everyone is a Christian. The word “Christian” really means a follower of Christ. An atheist, who denies the existence of God and does not believe in Christ, is obviously not a Christian. Nor can a person who has never heard of Jesus, be one of His followers, unless he later hears the good news and becomes one of His followers. Likewise, people who follow other gods, worship idols, satan and so on, are obviously not Christians – they do not believe in, or follow after, the teachings of Christ. Not only this, but Jesus was talking one day to some people who said they believed in God, but He said to them, “You are children of your father, the devil; and you do what your father wants you to do. He has always been a murderer, and will have nothing to do with the truth, because he is not truthful himself. When he lies, it is just like his nature, because he is a liar and inspires others to lie too” (John 8:44). So if some people are children of the devil, then they are certainly not Christians, and are not my brothers or sisters! Only God’s children (true Christians) are my brothers and sisters, because God’s Word, the Bible, says we are sons or daughters of God.

2. Not everyone who lives in a Christian country or who is born in a Christian family is a Christian

When I was in Fiji some years ago I spoke to a Muslim who honestly believed that everyone in New Zealand was a Christian (“because New Zealand is a Christian country”) and he didn’t want to become a Christian because of all the sin and immorality in New Zealand – “and if that’s what a Christian is, then I don’t want to become one”, he said. I explained to him that there are very few **true** Christians in New Zealand and this is why the country has so much evil in it – because the vast majority of the people have never experienced the life-transforming power of God which changes their lives and makes them Christians. The Bible says, “To everyone who receives Jesus and believes in His Name, He gives the power (authority) to become children of God; this does not happen because we are born of Christian parents, or because someone wants us to become a Christian – it is something only God can do” (John 1:12-13). Being born in a hospital does not make me a doctor, and having a father who is a doctor does not, in itself, make me a doctor either; it is something that I do by my own choice. So it is with becoming a Christian.

3. Not everyone who goes to church is a Christian

Jesus once talked to a man who was a church leader of his day, and He said something to him that really surprised him. Jesus said that being a church leader was not enough: “Listen”, He said, “Unless a person is re-born, he cannot see God’s Kingdom. In fact, unless a person has a spiritual re-birth He cannot enter Heaven” (John 3:3, 5).

People have said to me, “The church is full of hypocrites”. If, by this statement, they mean that there are lots of people in the church who are not true Christians, and so are not living the Christian life, then I would certainly agree. Many people go to church from completely wrong motives: because it is the thing to do, because people expect it, because of habit, to keep up appearances, to ease their conscience, because of what people would say if they stopped. These are not the reasons a true Christian goes to church. I can spend all my spare time at rugby matches, but this does not make me a footballer; nor does going to church make me a Christian.

4. Not everyone who “believes in God” is a Christian

A lot of people say that they believe in God, as if that automatically makes them a Christian. But the word “believe” can mean either of two things: it can mean merely an intellectual acceptance of something, or it can mean not only this, but such a deep and practical belief that it changes a person’s life. James 2:19 says, “It is good that you believe that there is one God, but even devils believe this – and tremble with fear!” Evil spirits know that there is a God, and this causes them to tremble with fear – but they don’t do anything about that knowledge: it is merely a fact that they know to be true. And many people intellectually believe in God in this same way, and it has virtually no effect on them at all! I may “believe” in communism, in the sense that I know it exists, and that it is a powerful force in a few parts of the world today, but I certainly don’t follow it! On the other hand, I believe in God, and this belief has completely changed my life.

5. Not everyone who leads a good life is a Christian

I have talked to people who have said that they try to live a good life and so they think they will get to Heaven. Sometimes I have asked them, “How good do you have to be to get to Heaven?” The Bible says that there is *no sin at all* in Heaven and so if we have only committed one sin, that is enough to keep us out. Jesus set the standard, and He said, “Be perfect, just as God is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). No one (except Jesus Himself) has ever lived a perfect life, so obviously our few “good deeds” are not enough. Some people think that if our “good deeds” outweigh the bad ones, then we’ll be all right. But imagine a judge in court: if a person steals, commits violence and murder, on one day of the year, the judge cannot let the man go free just because he is good for the rest of the year! If he did, then he would be giving him a licence to sin; neither can God forget our sins because we have some good points. All sin must be punished.

Imagine some trampers who are caught in the hills with a wild, deep river flowing between them and their camp. The river is wide, but they decide to try to jump it. The first one tries, but falls hopelessly short of the mark, and is swept away by the river. The second does much better, but still falls short and drowns too. The last one takes a long run, and jumps as far as he can possibly go – he almost makes it, and clutches at some grass at the edge of the opposite bank, but it gives way and he too falls to a watery grave. The last man was good at jumping – he almost made it, but his fate was the same as the others who missed by a long way. And so it is with Heaven – one sin, no matter how small, will keep you out. Revelation 21:8 says “Those who are cowards, the faithless, obscene, murderers, immoral people, those who practise spiritism or witchcraft, those who worship idols, and all liars will be cast into Hell”. Notice that the fate of a person who lies, is the same as that of a murderer. God is perfect, and so is Heaven – there is no room for any sin at all.

In the same way, taking Communion (or Mass), being baptised, or confessing to a priest is not sufficient to make us a Christian. Ephesians 2:8-10 says something very important; notice the order of the words very carefully, “We are saved by God’s grace (His loving favour) which we receive by faith. This is not something we can do ourselves – it is God’s gift to us. We cannot earn it by our good works, or else we would boast. We are made by

God, and created in Christ to do good works and to lead good lives.” We are saved **BY GOD'S GRACE**, which we receive **THROUGH FAITH**, and we **DO GOOD WORKS** *because we are Christians*. Our good works and godly lives follow as a result of us becoming Christians – they do not make us Christians.

This naturally leads to the question: then how can anyone be saved, and become a Christian?

What is a true Christian?

Once again my answers come straight from the Bible: this is not what I *think* a Christian is, or what I would *like* a Christian to be, nor is it what *most people* think a Christian is; this is what God says a person must do to become a Christian. A true Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ, and this is what **He** says we must do:

1. Believe: *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”* (Acts 16:31)

As mentioned above, this belief is not merely an intellectual acceptance of the facts about Jesus, but a personal and practical committal of your life to Him. We must believe that He died to pay the penalty for our sins, and that He is willing to forgive us for them, if we will ask Him. (See also John 3:16 and Hebrews 11:6)

2. Repent: *“Repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven”* (Acts 2:38)

To repent means to completely turn about – once we lived a selfish, sinful, self-centred life; now we commit our life completely to God and follow Him. It means to be truly sorry for all our sin and be determined, with God’s help, to turn from it. This may involve making restitution to someone we have wronged. It will certainly mean a changed life (see Matthew 3:1-12).

3. Confess our sin: *“If we confess our sins, God is reliable and trustworthy and will forgive our sins and wash us from all evil”* (1 John 1:9)

Remember that confessing sin is sheer hypocrisy and an insult to God if we do not mean to turn from that sin. And God knows whether or not you mean it! But when God forgives, He also forgets it! (See Jeremiah 31:34)

4. Receive Jesus: *“Jesus came to His own people, but they did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, He gave the right to become God’s children – Christians”* (John 1:11-12)

We must ask Christ to come into our life, not only to take away past sin, but also to change us so that we might live the right sort of lives in the future. (See Revelation 3:20 and 2 Corinthians 5:17)

5. Acknowledge Christ: *“If you say with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Romans 10:9)

We must acknowledge to other people that Jesus has now become our Lord and Saviour – that we are now Christians. (See also Matthew 10:32-33). Notice that if Jesus is to be our

Lord, then we must be obedient to Him!

6. Persevere: *“He who endures to the end will be saved”* (Matthew 24:13)

We must continue on in the Christian life. If we later turn our back on our Christian life, if we deny Christ and all He has meant to us, and forsake our Christian life, then we can no longer truthfully call ourselves Christians. However, there is no reason why this should happen: God will give us the power to persevere throughout the whole of our life, if we are willing to follow Him. (See also Hebrews 6:4-8 and Revelation 2:10)

Probably a lot of what you have just read will be quite new to you – although it is actually nearly 2000 years since it was written in the Bible! Perhaps, after reading this, you realize that you have never really been a true Christian at all, but would like to become one. This is how you can: we have said that a true Christian is one who believes that Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sin, and that God raised Him from the dead; the true Christian is sincerely sorry for his sin and is willing to turn from it; he confesses his sin to God and asks His forgiveness, and also invites Jesus Christ to come into his life and make him a child of God; finally he is prepared to witness for Christ and make Him Lord of his life.

If you believe this, and would like to become a true Christian, you can pray right now and ask Christ into your life. You might like to make up your own prayer, or you can pray the following prayer; remember that it is the sincerity of your heart before God that is important.

“Lord, I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins and that you have raised Him from the dead. I am truly sorry for my sins and ask your forgiveness, and for your power to turn from all my evil ways. Please come into my life now and make me a child of God. Please help me to witness for Christ and make Him Lord of my life. I thank you Lord, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

“If we confess our sins, God will forgive our sins and wash us clean” – 1 John 1:9. “I write this to you who believe in Jesus, the Son of God, so that you might know that you have eternal life through Him” – 1 John 5:13. “The Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts and confirms to us that we are truly children of God” – Romans 8:16.

What next?

What are the next steps after becoming a Christian? There are five main things that it is important for a Christian to do, right through life:

1. Read the Bible: I suggest that you get a modern translation and read the Gospel of John first. After reading John, read through the rest of the New Testament, in order.

2. **Pray each day:** Thank God for all He has done for you, ask His forgiveness for everything you may have done wrong that day, and pray for the needs of other people, as well as your own needs.
 3. **Go to a good evangelical church** – one where you feel at home, the people are friendly, and the Word of God is really preached. Make Christian friends and seek their help and advice.
 4. **Obey God** whatever He tells you. God may speak to you through His Word, the Bible, or through Christian friends, or during a time of prayer. Always be obedient.
 6. **Witness for Christ.** Tell your friends and others what Christ has done for you. Tell them how they too can become Christians.
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If you would like to tell us that you have come to Christ as a result of reading this article, or if you would like further help or literature, please email us. All literature and advice are FREE, without obligation.

Email: caughley@xtra.co.nz

One of our further books is called

“Now I’m a Christian – What Next?”

This is available on our website <https://www.pray-for-the-nation.org>
on the **Bible Study Books** page.

Thank you, and God bless you!