

GOD'S INVITATION:

How to Become a Christian

“What it Takes to Get it Right”

The Sixth Movement – The Biblical Definition of Christian

We're going to discuss the question: “What is a Christian?”

We might say we know what a Christian is. Ask a group what a Christian is, especially a high school group, they'll say, “I don't know but I don't want to be one.” Or if it's an older group they'll say, “Well everybody in America is a Christian. We're living in a Christian nation.” Or a Christian is somebody that believes in God. A Christian is somebody that runs around doing good all the time. A Christian is a person who can't have any fun because they never get to do anything that's really fun.

Ask a junior high group they'd say, “A Christian, well that's a sissy.” Or a Christian is for old people who've already had their fun. What is a Christian really? What is the definition, if someone asks? Naturally if someone asks if someone is a Christian, many people say, “Oh yeah. I'm a Christian. I believe in God.” What is the definition of a Christian?

The only way to arrive at proper definition where we can be in perfect accord is to turn to the Word of God. Let's direct our

attention to just two verses. We're going to share three characteristics of a Biblical Christian.

Ask the question, "As we share these things, am I a Christian?" In other words, are these three characteristics true of each of us as a person?

We'll be looking at Romans 5:1 and 2.

This great epistle of Paul to the Romans is an epistle talking about God's righteousness and how it can be made available to us as human beings.

We read the following:

v. 1 Therefore, having been made right in God's sight by faith, we are having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

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v. 2 by whom also we are having access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

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Notice we took that great big word "justified" and translated it

“made right in the sight of God.”

Notice in these two verses the three characteristics of a New Testament Christian. This particular passage is perfect for Christmastime simply because these are three beautiful packages that are all wrapped up and tucked underneath God’s Christmas tree—the Cross.

If we thought about being a Christian as something which we have to do, something which is our responsibility, we the wrong concept. We have a loving God who’s done everything necessary and He waits to give us gifts.

Here are the **THREE GIFTS** which characterize a Biblical or New Testament Christian.

1. PEACE WITH GOD.

Man in his natural state, born into the world, has a will of his own, has desires for his life, has direction which he’d like to go. This was certainly expressed back in the Garden of Eden.

God and men are in a natural state—at war. There cannot be peace between a holy God and sinful man in his natural state. The lines are clearly drawn. We have the righteous Creator and we have the rebellious creature—and so there’s war.

There are a number of verses in the Bible that speak about this problem and dilemma.

Romans 3:17, 18

And the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Isaiah 48:22

“There is no peace,” saith the Lord, “unto the wicked.”

Isaiah 57:21

“There is no peace,” saith my God, “to the wicked.”

Isaiah 59:8

The way of peace they know not, and there is no judgment in their tracks. They have twisted their ways before them; whoever walks in that way does not know peace.

Now the cry in Jeremiah’s day was for peace and he said:

Jeremiah 6:14

“Peace, peace,” ... when there is no peace.

There is no peace saith my God unto the wicked. As we celebrate at the Christmas season the coming of the Prince of Peace to the world in birth, there will never be real universal peace until the Prince of Peace—Jesus Christ—comes back to earth again to set up His Kingdom.

Now how is it that a person who, responding to Jesus Christ, has peace with God? There are two reasons why it is possible in Romans 5:1 to say:

“Therefore, a man being made right with God has peace.”

The first reason is because:

1. BLOOD HAS BEEN SHED.

Someone must die to meet the righteous demands of a holy God before we can have peace.

Romans 6:23

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Christian and God are no longer at odds. The Bible says they have been reconciled. God does not need to be reconciled to man. Man needs to be reconciled to God. And through an act of faith, by receiving Jesus Christ as the provision for his sin (or her sin), God—a holy God—and sinful man have been reconciled. No longer at odds, there's peace and unity where once there was hatred, rebellion and indifference.

This peace comes through our Lord Jesus Christ because blood has been shed.

Now when Jesus Christ went to the Cross, He experienced the horrible agony of being forsaken by the Father. He experienced the storm of God's wrath, else why did He cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (ref. Matthew 27:46)

In Colossians we read a very interesting statement:

Colossians 1:20

And having made peace through the blood of His cross.

In the Old Testament blood sacrifices were offered to a holy God in anticipation that the Lamb of God—Jesus Christ—was going to go to the Cross and pay for our sin.

The poet put it this way:

Now freed from sin I walk at large,
My Saviour's blood my full discharge.
At his dear feet my soul I lay,
A sinner saved, all homage pay.
(source unknown)

Peace must come by way of the Cross. There's no other way.

Some people might be repulsed by a bloody religion. God is not. God has one requirement as a holy God for sin and that's the shedding of blood. And the shedding of the blood of His own dear Son makes it possible for us to have peace—if we do

have peace with a holy God.

If our basis for salvation is on anything else than the blood of Jesus Christ, we won't make it.

Because Christ has shed His blood it is possible for a holy God to look on us and Jesus Christ's blood is adequate as a provision for our sin.

The Christmas angels announced it when they said, "Peace on earth," because they foresaw the fact that Christ was going to go to the Cross and make it possible for peace.

The prophet foresaw it in Isaiah when he said:

Isaiah 9:6

Unto us a child is born and unto us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called wonder of a counselor, a mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.

Now the first reason that a Christian has peace with God is because blood has been shed in our behalf.

The second reason is because:

2. God was SATISFIED with what Jesus Christ did.

Remember a little statement that goes throughout the life of

Christ?

“This is My beloved Son in whom I’m well pleased.”

“This is My beloved Son in whom I’m well pleased.”

“This is My beloved Son in whom I’m well pleased.”

That’s the Father pronouncing His seal of approval on the work and ministry of His Son as He lived here on earth. And the very fact that Jesus Christ is alive today and interceding in our behalf at the right hand of God the Father is token evidence of the fact that the Father is satisfied. If He had not been satisfied with the work of Jesus Christ upon the Cross, He would have left Him in the grave.

So God the Father can give peace as a just and holy God because blood has been shed and because God is satisfied with what the Son did in this mission that He performed in coming into our world.

Now the second thing that is a characteristic of a Christian is seen in the next verse. We read the following statement:

“by whom also we are having access by faith into this grace wherein we stand;”

Whereas the Christian has peace with God, the Christian also has access to God. Now what’s the definition of the word “access”?

The word “access” means we have the privilege and the right to come in. For instance, we could say that we have the right and privilege to go to the White House and see the President, but it wouldn't take very long until we see this is false.

But we do have the right to walk into our own home. We can walk into the door without knocking and go to bed and nobody's disturbed. It's because we're related to that family.

Because of a relationship to Jesus Christ, the Christian has access into the presence of God the Father. This is the reason we have so many of these wonderful promises in the Word of God. There is one Mediator between God and man—one go-between—the man Christ Jesus. (ref. 1 Timothy 2:5)

Because we're related to His Son we have access into His presence. We have been born into His family as a result of receiving Christ as our Savior. Because a relationship has been established with God's Son and peace has been made for us, we now have access into the very presence of God the Father.

Now how is it that we can have access as Christians? There are **TWO REASONS** to why we have access:

1. Because the veil was rent in the temple at the time of the death of Jesus Christ.

Understand the significance of the Old Testament tabernacle

and the pattern for the temple during the time of Christ?

There's the outer court, then we come to the inner court, and into the very Holy of holies. And only one time a year was the priest allowed, on the Day of Atonement, to go beyond the veil into the presence of the Holy of holies which was depicting the presence of God. They always stayed without the veil, with no entrance in there. And the priest went in to sprinkle blood on the Mercy Seat one time a year, representing the sins of the nation Israel. And if God was favorably disposed to the blood sacrifice and the priest was allowed to come back out again. His very life could be taken in this offering of blood on the Day of Atonement.

An interesting thing happened when Jesus Christ died on the Cross. The priest was in his afternoon sacrifice when Christ died upon the Cross. And as he stood before the Altar of Incense, about 3:00 in the afternoon on that Good Friday, an unseen hand reached at the top and tore that great veil from top to bottom. And it's a holy God saying, "Look, I don't have to be shut out from you anymore because you come by a new and living way, the precious blood of Jesus Christ."

So the Father in that act says now, because sin has been paid for in the death of Christ upon the Cross, when Christ cried "It is finished," the veil was rent. It's a holy God saying, "Come on in. I care. I'm concerned about you."

The writer to the book of Hebrews describes it:

Hebrews 10:19, 20

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil—that is to say, the veil of His flesh.

The body of Christ was broken, the veil was rent and now we have access into His presence.

The second reason that we can have access into the presence of God is:

2. Because the separation between a holy God and sinful man has now been spanned with the Cross of Jesus Christ.

It's summed up best by the hymn writer:

Oh the love that drew salvation's plan,
Oh the grace that brought it down to man,
Oh the mighty gulf that God did span,
At Calvary.

(source unknown)

It's foundational to have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And as a result of peace with God, we also have the right and the privilege of coming into His presence. The reason we have this wonderful privilege is because as God the Father—as far as He's concerned—Isaiah predicted it:

Isaiah 53:6

All we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned everyone to his way and the Lord hath laid on Him, Jesus Christ, the sin of us all.

God the Father looks on us through God the Son.

During the time that the west was being settled in our land, there was one thing that scared the early Americans more than almost anything else that could have happened to them. And this was the horrible fear of the prairie fire. And as they moved westward many, many times the wagon trains were consumed with a prairie fire.

One afternoon there was about 30 wagons. They looked off in the distance as it was beginning to come toward dusk and they saw the earmarks on the horizon of a horrible prairie fire blowing their direction. There was a great deal of fear, crying and everything else in the wagon train, until the wagon master gave a very strange command. He instructed several men to go to the back of the train and to light a fire. These men went to the back of the train lighting fires and the human impulse of all those around, was we'll all be destroyed. This is suicide.

And then as soon as the fire began to burn he had the wagons move back on charred ground. Finally one little girl came and said, "Sir, do you think we're all going to be alright?" Whereupon he answered, "Yes, because we're standing where

the fire has already been.”
(source unknown)

On him Jesus Christ almighty vengeance fell,
That would have sunk a world to hell.
He bore it for a chosen race,
And thus becomes my hiding place.
(source unknown)

Jesus Christ bore our judgment—for the judgement for our sin
so we could have access into His presence.

We should ask ourselves, are we a biblical Christian? Do we
have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ? Do we
have access into His presence? Have we talked to Him yet
today?

The third thing that we see in the passage:

“Therefore, having been made right in God’s sight...we are
having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”

“by whom also we are having access by faith into this grace
wherein we stand; and we are rejoicing in hope of the glory of
God.”

If we are a New Testament Christian, in the biblical sense, in
the PAST at some time when we received Jesus Christ as our
Savior, we have peace with God.

In the PRESENT, as a New Testament Christian, we have access into His presence.

And as far as the FUTURE is concerned, we're not worried a bit about it because we have a hope of His soon return. Or if we have our physical demise before He gets here, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. And that's the hope of a New Testament Christian.

Now "hope," according to the dictionary is the expectation of something desired. We all sit here with some kind of hope of what we would like to get for Christmas. And it is the expectation that we will get it if we make our needs known.

What is our hope, as far as what happens when we finish here?

First Corinthians says if we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most miserable. (see 1 Corinthians 15:19)

We're just petrified with fear of what's going to happen because life is slipping away from us. We can't do anything about it.

Where is our hope today?

Psalm 71:5 says: "For thou art my hope, O Lord God. Thou art my trust from my youth."

Psalm 38:15: "For in Thee, O Lord, do I hope. Thou wilt hear,

O Lord, my God.”

Psalm 39:7: “And now Lord what wait I for? My hope is in Thee.”

Where is our hope today? The hope of the Christian is steadfast and sure because it is in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Living Word, recorded in God’s Word, the written Word.

Now how is it that a New Testament Christian can have hope? There are two very definite reasons for hope. The first is because of the testimony of Jesus Christ Himself.

John 14:1, 2

Stop being troubled in your heart. You believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so I would have told you. I’m going to prepare a place for you, and if I go I’m going to come again and receive you unto Myself.

That’s the hope of the Christian spoken from the lips of the Lord Jesus.

The second reason that a Christian has hope is because of the testimony of the apostle Paul. Here’s the testimony of the Lord Jesus, and now couple that with the testimony of the apostle Paul.

In 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, early in his ministry Paul says, “O death

where is thy sting? O grave where's thy victory?" Well that just doesn't say a whole lot because he's a young man and he's far away from it. What about when he's right down there at the end of the line? Well 2 Timothy chapter 4 is the last thing he ever wrote. He says:

2 Timothy 4:6

I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure is at hand.

He's saying, "I am already—I can feel my physical life going. I'm getting ready to die. Am I depressed?" as he looked downward into the grave.

No he looks down into the grave with confidence. "I'm ready to be offered. The time of my departure is at hand. I'm breaking up camp. I'm going on a journey. I'm going to get home to my permanent dwelling."

The Apostle Paul's death down here was just living in a tent. And we're going to our permanent dwelling and we're going to pull up stakes and go there when we die physically.

In verse 7 he looks backward on his ministry and he says:

2 Timothy 4:7

I fought a good fight, I finished the course, I've kept the faith.

And then verse 8 looks forward to the future with anticipation of heaven:

2 Timothy 4:8

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day.

Now these are three characteristics of a New Testament Christian. Are we a Christian now, in the biblical sense of the word? Do we really have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ? Do we have access into His presence? And do we have hope for the future?

Now maybe we're a Christian and we say, "Well I thought I was a Christian. But I certainly don't have peace. I don't seem to have access, and man I don't have a whole lot of hope. What's the deal? I thought I was!"

Well it's possible to be a Christian without peace, filled with anxiety, filled with a lack of trust and confidence because we're failing to believe what God has said in His Word.

It's possible also to be a Christian and not have access because there is some sin in our life that has broken the fellowship. It's not that we're not a Christian, it's just that our fellowship has been broken and every time we dial Him we get a busy signal.

And when we have that kind of problem, we better dial 1 John 1:9 and find out what it is that's breaking this line of

communication that ought to be ours as a Christian. Seeing God move in our life and the lives of others as a result of our prayers.

And if we're a Christian and we don't have hope, it could very possibly be that we have our priorities messed up and we're more concerned about things down here on earth than we really should be.

Hope thou only in God alone. Place our hope there and realize that that's the place where our hope belongs.

Now maybe we have a question or two about these three characteristics. If we ask ourselves if we're a Christian and we are, we can say, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift—the Lord Jesus—that made it all possible."

And if we're not, we should bow our knee before Him and invite this precious gift, the Lord Jesus, to come into our life.

Our Father, we just ask right now that if there is a anyone who has real questions about their eternal destiny, that You might speak to them. Lord show them that behind all of the façade, behind all of the trivia of life, maybe they might be a religious person. Behind all of this, there must come this relationship with the Lord Jesus that provides peace, access and hope. We praise You our Father for how You're going to use these words in the lives of those who study Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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NOTES

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