

What is a Christian?



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Welcome

Hello Friend.

Do you have questions about Jesus and Christianity?

This booklet is our attempt to introduce you to Jesus and to give you a start in your journey of faith.

Please let us know if we can help you in any way in your search for truth.

God bless you.

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Who is Jesus?

Who was this man called Jesus?

We know that he existed - The Encyclopedia Britannica and Wikipedia have extensive entries about an historical person called Jesus, but ... who was he?

We know that he has changed history dramatically - even the date system that we use to calculate the year we're living in is measured using this man's life. But who was he?

His influence on history

He wasn't formally educated, and he never travelled more than a hundred miles from the tiny place where he was born, yet he's changed human history more than anyone else.

Jesus taught like no one before or since. He fed multitudes of people. He healed everyone who asked Him for healing, and He raised the dead. He set people free from harmful actions and addictions, and He gave people hope, joy and purpose in their lives.

All of His disciples and millions of people through history, have been willing to die for this man, because of the effect he has had on their lives.

There has never been anyone like Him. Consider these quotes by famous people:

Napoleon Bonaparte said "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 possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and myself founded great empires, but upon what did the creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for him.”

HG Wells said “I am an historian. I am NOT a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth, is irrevocably the very centre of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all of history.”

Historian **Kenneth Scott LaTourette** said “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.”

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. No man can deny the fact that Jesus Existed, nor that his sayings are beautiful.”

He claimed to be God

An extremely important point that we need to be aware of is that Jesus claimed to be God. If someone today claims to be God we either think that they are mad or perhaps evil (in trying to convince others of something that is untrue).

Jesus not only claimed to be God, but he encouraged people to follow Him, and to obey and even worship Him. Consider some of these statements and events in His life:

Jhn 14:9 - Jesus said to him, "If you have seen Me you have seen the Father.”

Jhn 10:30 - "I and My Father are one."

Mat 9:6 - "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"--then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

Jhn 11:25 - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

Jhn 14:6 - Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Jhn 5:18 - Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

Jhn 8:58, 59 - Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." Then they took up stones to throw at Him; *(they did this because the penalty for calling oneself "God" was death in Jewish law, and Jesus had used the Old Testament name of God (I AM - Exo 3:13) for himself.*

Jhn 10:30 - 33 - "I and My Father are one." Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

Mar 14:61, 62 - Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

He fulfilled prophecies

Jesus fulfilled numerous prophecies written hundreds of years before He was born. Consider some of these:

<i>PROPHECY</i>	<i>VERSE</i>	<i>DATE</i>
He would be born in Bethlehem.	Micah 5:2	700 BC
He would be born of a virgin.	Isaiah 7:14	800 BC
He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey.	Zech 9:9	500 BC
He would have His hands and feet pierced, and the attackers would cast lots for His clothes.	Psalm 22:16, 18	1,000 BC
He would be buried in a rich man's tomb.	Isaiah 53:9	800 BC

There are over 300 Old Testament prophecies about Jesus that were fulfilled. The odds of this happening by chance are astronomical. Let's just work on the probability of 8 of those prophecies coming true by chance. The probability that one man could fulfil eight prophecies is one in 10 to the 17th power - That's a one with seventeen zeros after it.

Peter Stoner, Professor Emeritus of Science at Westmont College, says the following about this probability:- To help us wrap our brains around that figure, consider this analogy:

"Suppose that we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They'll cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would've had of writing these eight

prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote them in their own wisdom.” (Peter Stoner, Professor Emeritus of Science at Westmont College)

He rose again from the dead

Jesus died and was buried in a “Cave - tomb” that was hewn out of a solid hillside. A large stone sealed the tomb’s entrance, and a Roman guard sealed the entrance and remained to guard the tomb so that the body could not be stolen. Yet, three days later, the tomb was empty and there were over 500 eyewitnesses of His resurrection, many of whom were willing to die for their testimony that He had risen again.

Consider the words of these legal experts:

“To me the evidence is conclusive and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so convincing. As a lawyer I accept the gospel evidence unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts that they were able to substantiate.” **Sir Edward Clark** - *British High Court Judge*

“There is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ.” **Brooke Foss Westcott** - *famed scholar and regius professor at Cambridge in the nineteenth century.*

“According to the laws of legal evidence used in courts of law, there is more evidence for the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ than for just about any other event in history.” **Dr Simon Greenleaf** - *famous Harvard University professor.*

“I have spent more than 42 years as a defence trial lawyer appearing in many parts of the world and am still in active practice. I have been fortunate to secure a number of successes in jury trials and I say unequivocally the evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.” **Sir Lionel Luckhoo** (1914-1997)
Considered one of the greatest lawyers in British history. He's recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records as the "World's Most Successful Advocate," with 245 consecutive murder acquittals and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II -- twice.

Liar, Lunatic or Lord?

CS Lewis, who wrote the famous Narnia books, was an Oxford and Cambridge professor who became a Christian later on in his life because of the weight of evidence that was presented to him. He said about Jesus:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the 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 patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

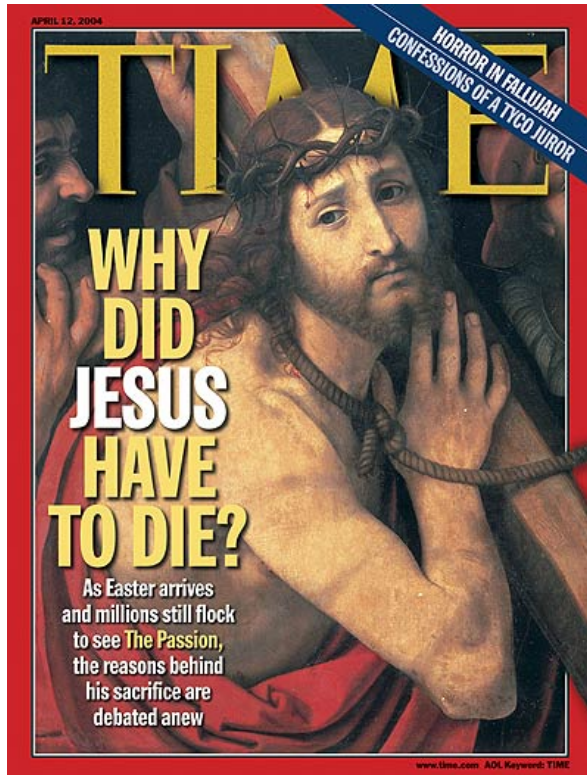
If you received a letter from your bank saying that there had been some bank error - a mistake on their part - and you would receive a hundred thousand pounds into your account if you simply went into the bank, would you go? I am sure you would go. Why? Because the claim is so

large (even though it seems unlikely). You would at least check it out, wouldn't you?

The claims that Jesus has made are even more important and far reaching than a bank letter saying you would receive £100,000. They deserve to at least be "checked out" by us. God says in Jeremiah chapter 29 "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart."

I encourage you to find out who this Jesus is. Ask Him to show Himself to you. You won't regret it.

Why did Jesus have to die?



Time magazine - April 12th, 2004

The fact that He died is not in dispute. Roman crucifixion is widely regarded as one of the cruellest and most effective forms of corporal punishment ever invented, and the Romans certainly were very good at executing people. Jesus' death has been painted, written about, sung about and been made into movies. Yet why did He have to die?

The answer lies in the fact that God has in His character both LOVE and JUSTICE - He is a loving Father and a just Judge.

We all have an inbuilt sense of the need for justice. When someone wrongs us, we have a desire for there to be order and fairness restored. Where did we get this sense from? This comes from God. We simply know that there should be justice.

But what happens when justice and love are competing in our hearts?

Imagine being the umpire of a tennis match where your daughter is one of the players. It would be difficult to be impartial, wouldn't it? It would be difficult to ensure that justice is done if it meant that your daughter was unhappy, because you love her and don't want to see her upset.

Imagine a judge presiding over a court case where his own son was being tried for a crime. The son is guilty and deserves punishment, but the judge loves him dearly and does not want to punish him.

What does he do? Does he stop being just and impartial simply to save his son? Or does he stop being loving?

Imagine the judge striking the desk with his gavel and saying "I declare you guilty - the punishment is a fine of £100,000" and then the judge gets off the bench and writes out the cheque for the full amount of the fine. That is what God did when Jesus died on the cross.

The Good News of Christianity is that God became a man to take the punishment that we all deserve. Jesus, by dying on the cross, was satisfying justice fully on behalf of all of men's sins, and showing how much God loves us too.

Jhn 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Consider these Bible verses:

Ro 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Jas 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

1Pe 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

1Pe 2: 24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."

Isa 53:4-6 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Rom 5:6-8 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

2Co 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Heb 9:28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Rom 4:25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Col 1:21-22 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled

you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation--

Ps 85:10 Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.

Why did Jesus have to die? God was Himself paying the debt we owed ... and ensuring we can be completely forgiven and free from punishment.

Jesus' death on the cross was "enough". No further punishment or payment or penance is required.

Jesus' last words before He gave up His Spirit were, "It is finished!" This was a Greek commercial word "**Tetelesti**". It was a word that shop owners would write across an invoice when it had been fully paid and no debt remained. It actually means "PAID IN FULL". This is what Jesus shouted as He died, and this is what He achieved on the cross for you and I.

Can I really Trust The Bible?

Imagine I told you that you must go to a library and choose **sixty-six books**. They can be any books but they must be written by **forty** different authors who come from all sorts of **different backgrounds** and professions. The books must have been written over a period of **sixteen hundred years**, and must be written in **three different languages**, on **three different continents**.

What are the chances that the 66 books would all share a common story

line and a common theme? How likely is it that they could be compiled into one unified volume as if they had been written by one author?

It would be incredible for this to occur, and yet this is exactly what the Bible is: Written by forty different people, from many different backgrounds, over a period of one thousand six hundred years, in three different languages, on three different continents, and yet it is a unified book, obviously written by one author.

Bestseller

A novel that sells 25,000 copies is considered to be extremely good - a "bestseller". According to The New York Times, the novel Ben Hur, in its twenty eight years in print, has sold a million copies, and "A Tale of Two Cities" is one of the best selling books of all time - it has sold Two hundred million copies since it was written in 1859.

The Economist says that over a hundred million copies of the Bible are sold or given away **every year**, which equates to daily sales of 274,000 copies!

The Guinness Book of Records lists the Bible as the world's best-selling and most widely distributed book, and recent estimates put the number printed between 1815 and 1975 at more than **five billion** copies.

What is it about this book that has made it so popular?

Many millions of people would testify that it is not simply “another book”, but that it is God’s very words to them.

Queen Elizabeth

"To what greater inspiration and counsel can we turn than to the imperishable truth to be found in this Treasure House, the BIBLE?"

Queen Victoria - to an African Prince

"Tell your prince that this Book (the BIBLE) is the secret of England's greatness"

Helen Keller

"The BIBLE gives me a deep, comforting sense that 'things seen are temporal, and things unseen are eternal'".

Robert E. Lee

"The BIBLE is a Book in comparison with which all others are of minor importance, and which in all my perplexities and distresses has never failed to give me light and strength"

Abraham Lincoln

"I believe the BIBLE is the best gift God has ever given to man. All the good of the Savior of the world is communicated to us through the Book. But for it, we could not know right from wrong?"

Napoleon

"The BIBLE is not merely a book; it is a Living Being, with an action, a power, which invades everything that opposes its extension, behold! It is upon this table: This Book, surpassing all others; I never omit to read it, and every day with some pleasure"

Sir Isaac Newton

"There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history." ... I have a fundamental belief in the Bible as the Word of God, written by men who were inspired. I study the Bible daily."

Ronald Reagan

"Of the many influences that have shaped the United States into a distinctive nation and people, none may be said to be more fundamental and enduring than the Bible "

Theodore Roosevelt

"It is necessary for the welfare of the nation that men's lives be based on the principles of the Bible .

No man, educated or uneducated, can afford to be ignorant of the Bible"

"A thorough understanding of the BIBLE is better than a college education"

George Washington

"It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible "

Woodrow Wilson

"I am sorry for men who do not read the Bible every day. I wonder why they deprive themselves of the strength and pleasure"

"When you have read the Bible, you know it is the Word of God, because it is the key to your heart, your own happiness, and your own duty"

Voltaire

Voltaire, the famous French philosopher, said “One hundred years from today the Bible will be a forgotten book.”

Today, everyone has forgotten his quote — but not the Bible! After Voltaire died, for nearly 100 years, his homestead was used as the book depository for the French Bible Society. They sold Bibles out of his house! It's now a museum.

The Bible calls itself God's infallible word

Old Testament writers refer to what they wrote as the very words of God over 3800 times. New Testament writers repeatedly claim divine inspiration as did the Old. Jesus Himself quoted from the Old Testament and said the phrase “scripture must be fulfilled” or its equivalent many times.

The Apostle Peter, who wrote several New Testament books, called Paul's writings “Scripture” (the inspired words from God) in 2 Peter 3:15, and Paul, when he wrote to Timothy, quoted a passage from Luke and referred to it as “Scripture” (the inspired words from God).

What is “scripture”? It refers to the very written words of God:
2 Peter 1:20, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

2 Timothy 3:16, 17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Jesus quoted “Scripture” as being the answer and end to any argument:

Joh 10:35 “... the Scripture cannot be broken”

Mt 22:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.

How did we get the Bible?

It is sometimes wrongly assumed that there were a lot of letters and writings about Jesus in the early centuries and that the central Catholic Church imposed a strict set of rules from Rome telling people which books were "Scripture". This is incorrect.

While there were many writings, the special group of letters and writings that were called "Scripture" by the early Christians arose by each group of Christians in each geographical location deciding for themselves which writings were inspired. The miraculous part of this is that **they all chose the same 27 New Testament books independently of each other**. No one imposed the rule on them. It was obvious to all of them that these 27 books were inspired. Much later on (AD 363) a "council" was held where leaders from all the many Churches in all the far flung parts of the world got together and discussed which books they were using as their New Testament scripture - and they discovered they were all using the same books!

In some very early letters by Christians, we see evidence that they recognised the same books that we now know of as the New Testament:

- Clement of Rome (A.D. 95) mentioned at least eight New Testament books in his writings as being inspired.
- Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 115) mentioned seven books by name.
- Polycarp (A.D. 108), a disciple of John the apostle, mentions 15 of the books in his writings.
- Later, Irenaeus (A.D. 185) mentions 21 books, and
- Hippolytus (A.D. 170-235) 22 books.

The first “canon” (or official set of books included as “Scripture”) was the Muratorian Canon, which was compiled in A.D. 170. The Muratorian Canon included all of the New Testament books except Hebrews, James, and 3 John. In A.D. 363, the Council of Laodicea recognised the 27 books of the New Testament as the ones to be read in Churches around the world - but they were just ratifying what all the Churches already did on their own. The Council of Hippo (A.D. 393) and the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397) also affirmed the same 27 books as authoritative.

Accuracy of Bible documents

Compared to all other ancient documents and writings there is so much evidence of the Bible’s textual accuracy that it is overwhelming. Plato, Caesar, Tacitus, Sophocles and Homer all wrote ancient books, but only a few copies of their early manuscripts exist and these are all from several hundred years after they were first written. The Bible, on the other hand, has over 24,000 early manuscripts available to us and the earliest of these are from only 8 to 30 years after they were first written.

The Chester Beatty Papyrus II is the earliest piece of the New Testament known to exist. This contains most of Paul's letters copied circa AD 100.

The John Rylands Manuscript contains part of the Gospel of John copied in AD 100 - 130. It can be found in the John Rylands Library of Manchester, England.

Furthermore, even if we lost all 24,000 of the early manuscripts of the New Testament, we could reconstruct the whole of the New Testament (apart from eight verses) from quotations in normal letters between early Christians in the first few centuries after Jesus.

MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE FOR ANCIENT WRITINGS

Author	Written	Earliest Fragment / Copy	Time Span (in years)	Number of Manuscripts
Plato	427-347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,200	7
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,000	10
Tacitus	A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1,000	20
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	A.D. 1000	1,400	193
Homer (Illiad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500	643
NEW TESTAMENT	A.D. 40-100	A.D. 125	8-30	24,000

"It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries." (**Dr. Nelson Glueck**, *Rivers in the Desert* [New York, Grove, 1960], p. 31).

Another respected scholar, **Dr. J. O. Kinnaman**, declared: "Of the hundreds of thousands of artifacts found by the archeologists, not one has ever been discovered that contradicts or denies one word, phrase, clause, or sentence of the Bible, but always confirms and verifies the facts of the biblical record."

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls are perhaps the greatest archaeological find of our time. Produced by Jewish monastic Essenes, the scrolls number about 800; 200 of which are of biblical material. In 1947, shepherds

discovered them quite by accident in caves above the Wadi Qumran Valley, northwest of the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea Scrolls contain at least fragments of every book in the Old Testament except the book of Esther. More than ten scrolls were beautifully preserved intact including two copies of Isaiah.

Professor Millar Burrows of Yale University assigns these copies to the first century BC. Johns Hopkins University Professor William F. Albright places them more conservatively in the second century BC.

These copies of Isaiah, written 1,000 years earlier than the previously oldest known copies have proven to be "word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The five percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.

Great respect must therefore be given to the interim copyists. Diligently slaving for accuracy, they apparently achieved it.

"The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established." Comfort, Philip W. 'The Origin of the Bible' Tyndale House 1992 p.181 - former director of the British Museum,

The conclusion is that the Bible has been amazingly preserved and passed down to us correctly and we can trust it implicitly.

What about the Church?

Although the Church as an organisation has not always covered itself in glory, and it may sometimes seem to be a very human organisation, the Bible says that the real Church is **God's** invention and is extremely precious to Him, and important in fulfilling His purposes in the Earth.

Jesus is building His Church and nothing will stop that

Mat 16:18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Jesus died for the Church and is committed to protecting, and nourishing it.

Eph 5:25, 27, 29 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ... that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ... For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

Jesus has given great authority to the Church

Eph 1:22, 23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The Church is where God's glory and Spirit is found

Eph 2:22 ... you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Eph 3:21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The Church is the instrument God uses

Eph 3:10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, ...

The Church is where God's truth can be found

1Ti 3:15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

The Church is God's family

Eph 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

The Church is God's army

Psa 110:3 Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy splendour, your young men will come to you like dew from the morning's womb.

The Church is Jesus' body

Rom 12:5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Eph 4:16 from whom(Jesus) the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

What do we do about this?

Get involved. Be joined and knitted into a Church - become a part of this amazing organism - the Church of Jesus Christ. You cannot be a healthy Christian without being knitted into a local body of Christians called the Church. Even if Churches are not yet perfect, they are precious and loved by God and essential for your health and growth as a believer.

Heb 10:25 “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...”

What are the essentials of being a Christian?

So, what does it mean to be a “Christian”? What are the essential elements?

People have many different ideas about this, but we choose to look to the Bible for the definitive answer, rather than human opinion or tradition. Everything else- human ideas - don’t really carry any weight in the grand scheme of things.

1. “Born by the Spirit”

The Bible says that a Christian is someone who is “born again”. Jesus said that just as a person is born physically, we need to be born “spiritually” in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

When asked what this means, Jesus replied:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. " John 3:5, 6

Jesus was saying that we are not simply flesh and blood creatures, but that we have a spiritual part which is dead unless it is made alive by God (this what being “Born of the Spirit” means).

So this tells us that simply being a “cultural Christian” is not the real thing... Attending a Church, or being brought up in a Christian family or a Christian nation will not make me “born again”.

Similarly my own human effort or “religiousness” will not do it because it needs to be a supernatural act from God’s Spirit that makes my spirit come alive - I need a jolt in my spirit from God’s defibrillator. But how does this happen? The following descriptions in the Bible will help us understand:

2. Believe in Jesus

Act 16:30-31 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

What does it mean to “believe in Jesus”? It means the following...

- Believe that He existed and was who He claimed to be (God)
- Believe He died on the cross and rose again to fully pay for the forgiveness of your sins
- Believe His words and ways are best for your life
- Trust Him in a personal way as a friend and guide for the rest of your life

Jesus said the same things:

Jhn 6:47 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

Jhn 5:24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death into life.

3. Receive Jesus

Jhn 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

If I give you a gift, all you need to do is “receive” it.

This means that Jesus is standing offering you this new life and forgiveness, and you must simply say “yes please - thank you” and receive it. Unless you say “yes” and take it, it remains unclaimed.

4. Using your mouth - call on His name

Rom 10:9, 13 “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ...

"whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

We need to speak to God in order to receive this free gift of salvation.

5. Repent and be baptised

Act 2:37-38 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Repenting (turning away from sin), and being baptised (put under water with a prayer), are the outward signs that this internal new birth has happened.

Once you have received this amazing forgiveness and love from God it will always result in a desire to:

- Stop living in a way that displeases and hurts Him, and
- Publicly get baptised so that you show the world that you are now a new person

What does this look like in practice?

Often people say a prayer to receive Jesus which includes many of the elements mentioned above. It is something like this:

Dear Lord God, I believe that Jesus lived and died for me on the cross, and rose again. Thank you Lord. I receive this gift now, Lord. Thank you for forgiving me of my sins and washing me clean. I receive you, Lord Jesus, as my King and Saviour and friend. Thank you for making me a brand new person starting today. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

This will always result in changes to your life. The symptoms of this new life are:

- A new Joy inside
- A new peace from God
- A new love for God and others
- A new desire to spend time with God's people
- A new mission in life - telling others about God's love
- A new lifestyle - no longer living against God's ways and commands

Please let us know if you have prayed this prayer and if we can help you any further in this great journey of faith.

We would also love to help you to be baptised - let us know if we can be of any help.

Some Hard Questions

There are two main questions or objections that arise most often when people are questioning Christianity:

“Why do evil and suffering exist?” AND

“I have seen so many hypocrites and evil Christians.”

1. Why do evil and suffering exist?

The conversation can go something like this:

“Is God all powerful?” (Answer - “yes”)

“Is God all good?” (Answer - “yes”)

“Well if He is good and He has all power to stop suffering, why doesn’t He?”

The answer to this question consists of two very important truths from the Bible:

1. Free will - the Bible teaches that each human being has the freedom to choose - you have a “free will”. This means that you can choose to do whatever you like, and God will not override your freewill. Why is freewill important? Because a real, loving relationship is impossible if one party is forced to comply. Real relationships can only exist where there is the freedom of both parties to choose to love and participate in the relationship. Anything where there is force or coercion is a false relationship or something quite evil - like slavery. We know this to be true intuitively, and it is true in our relationship with God. You cannot have a relationship with your dishwasher because it is a machine. But if your child or friend washes your dishes you love them - why? Because they **CHOSE** of their own freewill to do it.

God does not force anyone to love Him, or to respond to His love, and thus many people choose NOT to love or serve or obey God and thus there is much evil and suffering in the world.

2. Delegated authority - the Bible says that God has delegated authority over all of creation to human beings (Psalm 8:6; Gen 1:26). This means that God will not intervene until the end of time - He has given us management responsibility over the planet and all of creation.

These two truths combine to explain why there is suffering.

Is this the end of the story? No.

God has made a way for us to be restored into relationship with Him and His desire is for His people (Christians) to start to restore His good plan and rulership over planet earth as much as we can with the help of His power within us. We do this through prayer, proclaiming truth, and helping alleviate suffering and pain and injustice.

He will come again one day and put everything right, and after that He will rule on earth and there will be no more suffering, pain or sadness.

He desires GOOD for us and for all of creation but He will not override free will and delegated authority until judgement day when all will be put right.

2. I have seen so many hypocrites and evil Christians

It is true that much suffering and evil has been caused by people calling themselves Christians. But according to the Bible, not everyone who says they are a Christian actually is. Listen to His words:

"Therefore by their fruits you will know them. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord,

Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness!' Mat 7:20-23

Don't allow other people's hypocrisy to keep you from the salvation God wants to give you.

On judgement day each of us will stand before God and give an account for our own lives and our own choices. We will not be able to hide behind other people's hypocrisy for our own actions.

He loves you dearly.

He has paid fully for you to be forgiven.

Accept Him today and allow His light and love to change you forever.
God bless you.