**Why You May Be Wrong: What Non-Believers Don’t Know About Being Christian**

***Once a Christian but not Really One Now? Never a Christian? So Why Are You not a Christian?***

It’s a common criticism that Christians are judgmental and hypocritical. And why, therefore, would it be surprising that some believers are disillusioned and non-believers do not want to associate with this kind of so-called godly individuals? Would you believe though, that this complaint first came from Jesus Christ himself? He observed these same traits in people and condemned them with these words, which one of his disciples (Matthew) recorded: “*If you don’t want to be judged, stop thinking it is ok for you to judge others… Why do you think you have the moral authority to carefully consider it’s not good for your brother’s vision to have a tiny splinter in his eye while you are ignoring the large chunk of lumber that’s covering your own eye… You hypocrite…* ” (paraphrased).

Clearly then the Christian faith does not condone this behavior at all!

Or maybe your problem with Christianity is much bigger. Could it be that you do not even believe Christianity is based on real people in history? If so, that too is understandable. What is the evidence that Jesus ever existed, you may ask? Certainly, conspiracy theorists have claimed that the stories of Jesus in the Christian bible, perhaps even the contents of the entire bible are made-up, fiction, particularly in the Gospel of John, which is different from the other Gospels. Such statements however, are opinions, not based on facts. Therefore it is necessary to present some important data to rebut this groundless claim. Considering that Jesus was a local prophet of little interest outside ancient Palestine it is remarkable that people of scholarly repute, outside biblical circles, such as, the historian Flavius Josephus should mention Jesus twice in his 20-volume history of the Jewish people written around 93 CE (AD). He also has provided historical evidence of Caiaphas who according to John’s Gospel spearheaded the killing of Jesus.

Josephus reports that the Roman Prefect Valerius Gratus who preceded Pontius Pilate, appointed Caiaphas as high priest in 18 CE. So there was a real life Caiaphas! The man who made the decision to crucify Jesus was Pilate, whose historical existence was long questioned by critics. His existence was finally verified by the discovery in 1961 in Israel of a stone inscribed with the name Pontius Pilate, Prefect. Pilate was a Roman administrator in Judea (approximately 26-36 CE.) during the time of Christ. Josephus also states that a victim of crucifixion was James, whom he described as the “brother of Jesus-who-is-called-Messiah”. Eusebius the ecclesiastical historian of Caesarea has also written about Pilate.

Even farther away from Jewish sources, with no known connection with Christianity, the Roman senator and historian Tacitus writing around 116 A.D. about the burning of Rome in 64 C.E., mentions that the Emperor Nero falsely blamed a hated group known as Christians. According to Tacitus, Christus who founded the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. So Pilate and Jesus “Christus” appear in historical records as real people who filled the role reported of them in the bible. With only this much information it is clear the Gospel accounts are real history. Therefore, in other words, we can and should rely on the bible record as factual. This means Jesus and His teachings are true; and what He says assures us that the powerful Christian God is the loving Father of believers, even if our much limited human understanding cannot always connect certain bad experiences with this truth.

Take for example the moral failures and hypocritical righteousness of human individuals in their religious roles through the centuries till today and no doubt into the future. These unchristian behaviors have unfortunately created a screen that hides or distorts the truth about the focal point of the Christian faith – the historical Life and Work of Jesus our Savior. Also the unnecessary competition between science and theology has resulted in mutual estrangement and created barriers to even well-educated individuals (some being persuasive leaders) understanding, let alone accepting God (see the article entitled: “Who Has It Right, Science or Christianity?” - on <http://www.findinnerpeace.co/topics/> scroll down). If you leave your mind open and curious you may discover for yourself truths that have not been known about the Christian faith, for example our unique three-in-one (or Triune) God and the incredible facts this faith presents and promises it offers everyone equally – and God does not lie.

Consider this fantastic resume that clearly tells the kind of God He is. The bible describes him as a Protector, Benefactor, Benevolent Guide, Good and Loving Father, Healer, Comforter; a God who feeds and refreshes us; is trustworthy, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, peace-loving, unchanging, just, completely untainted (holy), is objectively moral, patient and forgiving, and who sacrificed His only son as a necessary step to open a way for us to live with Him. He wants all mankind to be with Him and wants us, by our own choosing, to want Him. It is baffling that any right-thinking person would turn down or reject a chance to have a relationship with this God. “If He is real”, you respond. Well, for starters Jesus says He is and besides, this is part of the faith process a Christian takes up voluntarily. You probably have beliefs about other things for which you have no personal evidence.

Think about the matter and do not allow previous non-belief or doubt to stop you from coming over to the bright side. If you don’t believe right now just give yourself a chance to learn more and ask questions of qualified individuals. Nothing to lose; everything to gain!

Despite His awesome attributes, becoming a member of God’s family is quite simple but seriously important. It is not a game nor is it a tactic. The Apostle Paul describes the process this way to the Roman people of his day and it’s not any different today for anyone. He said:

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

To be saved means to become Christian. That’s it! And you’re on your way to heaven, already.

St Paul’s statement repeats what Jesus Himself told people – that He would rise from being dead, which will show he is God’s true Representative. For those who were not there to witness the actual event believing is all we can do. The truth of the Resurrection of Jesus however, is the basis of Christianity. It confirms the divinity of Jesus and therefore establishes the validity of His teachings including about heaven and hell; and that He is Christ (that is, Savior), the Son of God sent to earth from heaven where He has returned. In long-view hindsight we can appreciate how unacceptable to God our separation from him was, for God to send his only Son to mend the rift by dying. God’s solution was to die in our place, represented by His Son. Otherwise we would have experienced a kind of death that is permanent and inescapable because of sin. The “sin” we committed was that of turning our back to God; and this is what God forgave by the death of Jesus. As a result, the death of Christians is now a temporary physical means to leave this world and be transformed spiritually for our passage to heaven. As such we understand the reason for Christmas, which is so that we will receive the Message direct from Him to choose to return to God because He loves us and wants us in heaven with Him.

***To Choose or not to Choose***

So again, knowing this much about the Christian faith is it as offensive as you were perhaps led to believe, such that you would not choose heaven? Undeniably individuals and groups have made Christianity look very bad; from Popes to people performing a church function or other, to someone you may know who has described themselves as Christian; and back through the history of the faith for several thousand years. You may be someone who has experienced suffering, directly or indirectly, from or offended by such so-called Christians. These behaviors are disgraceful and most unfortunate. Notably as already stated, the Christian life is based on faith in the Gospel (or Message) of Christ; and the primary rules and expectations of behavior are stated in the Bible. Nowhere else! This Gospel or Good News is Jesus’ Message of faith, hope and love. So always ask for the bible passage that supports an action or behavior that you question or of which you disapprove.

Now I suppose you may need time to digest or grasp this new information. In the meantime here’s food for thought: For example, would you say you’ll will never again have anything to do with the police because you were told or you found out some members of the police force have been guilty of theft or murder; or if one of them stole your identity? Or will you shun firefighting because you believe that their profession is hypocritical to be “preaching” fire safety while some of their own commit arson? Are you turned off even more so and not use their services because their chiefs have sometimes seemed to shelter the guilty? Some people have reacted in a similar way to the offensive behavior of some Christian clergy.

**Becoming Christian**

Becoming Christian, that is accepting or acknowledging Christ (Jesus) means I make up my mind to follow the Teachings of Jesus. To repent means acknowledging the many ways, in the past, I’ve turned my back to Him (or “sinned” that is, “missed the mark” he set for us) and not care; but now pledging to discontinue or turn away from such behavior in future. You need to be aware however that the new Christian is not required to confess sins necessarily to any human person. As believers on the way to heaven the Holy Spirit who inhabits us guides us away from sin. Repentance is important because it sets the stage for living differently, consistent with agreeing to follow Christ. The intention to renounce behavior that is against God is consistent with wanting to be in his family; and God wants us as we are, regardless of our history.

Consider this comment about a woman named Rahab who is the only one known in different parts of the bible by the title: “the prostitute”. Insisting that faith in Him is the only basis on which God accepts us St James asks: *“… was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous…?*” (James chapter 2:25) No one has ever been too sinful for God to accept! It is by Grace, alone, from God that we are saved! On the cross, every believer received “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense” (G.R.A.C.E.) and that alone makes us righteous and reconciled in God’s sight. It is freely given at no cost to or contribution from us. Therefore we are not required to offer repentance first or in return in order to “qualify” to receive God’s grace. By God or Jesus’ saving grace alone we can come into the right relationship with God. God’s Grace is all the more worthy because we are getting a blessing or benefit that is not deserved. We read in the bible:

“… In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger. But God's mercy (compassion) is so abundant, and his love for us is so great, that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved…” (Ephesians chapter 2:3-5)

“For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it.“ (Ephesians chapter 2:8-9)

Also:

“For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.” (Romans 3:25-26)

***Benefits Kick in as soon as You Enlist***

So then have you considered what if you may be missing out on important blessing by refusing to acknowledge Jesus’ words and actions? Remember he was a real person who said God sent him and that he would return to God. He proved the truth in those words by his resurrection and ascension. Wouldn’t it be smart to at least play it safe? On the other hand those holding back from accepting Christ because they fear the embarrassment or shame in confessing past sins need to know that God anticipated those sins long before they were even committed, when He decided to send Jesus to cancel out by His death the incriminating and lasting effects of those sins. It is not your repentance or even less consequentially your confessing past sins, which you may or may not remember or be aware of that gives you salvation (admittance into Heaven). In fact, being human and imperfect God expects we will sin and all wrongdoing committed after expressing faith in Christ is already anticipated and forgiven. This occurred by God’s grace alone! That is, we get saved only on the basis of favor or goodwill from God. Would it be absolute grace if He imposed a condition to receive it? (Romans chapter 11:5-6) It would not!

Everything to do with God is absolute and must be, for Him to be God. For example, of what effect on my salvation, at the age of 20 or any age, is the “requirement” to confess that I stole a cookie at the age of six or thereabouts? So we can count on God to forgive totally. Actually faith in Jesus (or God, same thing) means believing in and following the Teachings of Jesus and with this comes the believer’s strong desire to stop sinning. In fact this desire by itself is repentance. For after all, the biblical meaning of repentance is: a change of heart; that is, a person’s conversion or transformation from a former way of life. Indeed when we turn away from our previous lifestyle and begin our Christian life it is with a guarantee of forgiveness already given. Repentance is built into the believer’s acceptance of Christ!

St James, Jesus’ apostle, encourages us to confess our sins to each other (James 5:15-16) but not as a condition or an obligation for salvation. He is addressing a specific case of relief for people with illnesses, which require the healing combination of requesting “the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord”, as he puts it. And if the illness is believed to have occurred because of some wrongdoing, confession is appropriate ”…so that you may be healed”, says James. According to this prescription in the Book of James, it follows that the “righteous person” doing the praying will need to hear the confession in order to customize that prayer to the sick person’s specific prayer need. So, going back to the original issue, basically Christianity is: starting and maintaining a relationship with God.

**What’s Expected of a Christian**

As in all relationships observing certain rules is essential to keeping the relationship. All close intimate and strong relationships require mutual trust. From this, would flow many other virtues of the relationship. Trusting God is an essential requirement of the Christian in order to keep the relationship alive. This expectation is stated for example in Psalm 32. The Message Version of the Bible gives a great reading, which you will find on the website: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/msg/psalms/32.html>. This kind of translation helps to interpret God’s words (sometimes stated as: the Word of God) in plain language. Understanding the Bible more fully however, can get complex. This does not mean it is too difficult to understand or that its subject matter is confusing; nor moreover that its interpretation is totally up to the reader as there cannot be a correct or wrong interpretation. That is not true. Certainly, by actually reading the bible within a community of believers makes its understanding and interpretation become clearer. Our relationship with God is put in the correct perspective when we master the fact that coming to God with trust, honesty and openness strengthens not only the relationship but also our own character.

Here are other statements of obligations for Christians as they develop a relationship with God:

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians chapter 3:12-14).

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

“Therefore (in the same way as the older folk have their own package of obligations needed for a life with Him, so too you younger ones must), make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.” (2 Peter 1:5-7)

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low positions Do not be conceited” (Romans 12:15-16).

“The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy” (Proverbs 12:25).

These passages provide a few samples of biblical values. They explain that the Christian is expected to have faith and trust along with other faith-based qualities they need to develop and maintain. These are all constructive and valuable.

**Having Faith or Doing Good: Where Do You Stand?**

You may have believed that doing good is enough. It is for an ordinary life. For life with God however you must sign on. But you may wonder about or feel stomped by the question of having faith versus doing good, in Christian life. It is really a question about what is sufficient or satisfactory as a goal to be attained as a Christian. There need not be any decision about which of believing or good actions has precedence in a Christian’s life because it is not a matter of either-or. Christian life always starts with believing in who Jesus is. Once we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior we come to understand the necessity of and value in doing good, because we follow after the behavior to us of Jesus himself in whom we have come to believe. The bible says: “*We love because he first loved us*.” (1 John 4:19); and Jesus himself says: “*As I have loved you, so you must love one another*” (John 13:34). Therefore performing good deeds are a natural outcome of faith in Christ.

The believer who says: “I do good things. That is better than merely professing a belief” is actually thereby motivated by the Christian belief to do the good actions. On the other hand to say: “My belief is all I need to demonstrate where I stand” means you have not examined your behavior to see to which action(s)—represented in the Christian message—your faith leads. Belief and action are always inseparable. Once you confirm to yourself and God that you accept Him as your God and Jesus as your Lord and Savior you will find yourself motivated to do good. After you agree now is as good a time as any to accept Jesus here are 4 steps you may take:

1. **Confess this desire to God**

You may use such words as:

***“Father, God, I have decided to accept Jesus your Son as my Lord and Savior and intend to learn about and follow His Teachings from this time forward. Thank you for loving me no matter what.”***

The Bible makes a big deal of this simple act of confession, describing such a person as “a new creation (or creature)”, “born again”, and “child of God”!

2. **Purchase a bible**

To begin your new, born-again life choose one written in language that’s easy for you to understand, such as the Message Bible, Good News Translation or the Contemporary English Version of the bible

3. **Start reading**

Perhaps for starters, a little every day from the Gospel of Luke (and try to read all the chapters), followed by the Acts of the Apostles and then the Book of Ecclesiastes followed by The Psalms). If you prefer you may or find these versions and books of the Bible on the Internet. The reading will help you become familiar with what God says, expects of believers and most important, why. The advantage in getting a paper Bible is you can underline passages and write in the margins.

4. **Find a mainstream church**

Choose one in which you feel comfortable enough to stay. Ask for recommendation or discover one and Google the name and comments about it to see if it appeals to you.

It is in a pastor-led community of Christians that you will learn further why the bible says what it says. As one who has been a Christian for decades my advice, when you do make the decision to continue attending a particular church, is to please stay neutral about any controversial matters that may arise, whether the issue is “biblical” or social. Evaluate things as your conscience dictates. In due course you will feel more confident in your knowledge or ability to take a stand or move to another church, if the atmosphere turns out to be uncomfortable.

You also need to know that Christians are also required to pray to keep our relationship with the Lord ongoing. This is when you may bring any life situation to God’s attention. The bible encourages us to make specific requests in prayer and you don’t have to use special or many words; just enough to clearly state your mind. Actually praying is talking to God. And, yes, God knows what you will pray about even before you do so. Still your saying it is important to God. Until you’re comfortable with shaping different kinds of prayers of your own, you may use this one below.

**4. A daily prayer**

**“Dear Lord, teach me how to follow you with sincerity
Make your way plain before me as I go through this day and always. For it is only you Lord who can make me live in happiness and safety. Thank you.” (adapted from a song)**

**Be assured that even before you present your needs to God He has already made this promise to every Christian:**

“*I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out* [says the LORD] *- plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen. When you come looking for me, you'll find me. I'll make sure you won't be disappointed*” (Jeremiah 29:11-14; the Message Version).

**The Christian God is good and trustworthy!**

So my friend, if you haven’t yet accepted Jesus it’s now your choice to believe or not. I have done my best to present information showing why being a Christian is the smart and right thing to do and why you have nothing to lose and much to gain if you choose to be a follower of Jesus.