

# THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (01).

June 10, 2007.

## Introduction.

In *Acts 11:26* we are told that “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” The “disciples” were those who had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Prior to this the disciples described themselves as “Brethren”. (*Acts 1:16; 9:17, 30*). They were those “who were being saved.” (*Acts 2:47*). They were those who belonged to “the Way.” (*Acts 9:2*). They were “saints”. (*Acts 9:13*). They were “believers”. (*Acts 10:45*).

The first time the disciples of the Lord Jesus were called “Christians” was in Antioch. This was not a name they chose for themselves. This was a name that was given to them by the people of Antioch. The people of Antioch were famous for giving descriptive nicknames to individuals and groups. The name “**Christian**” was given as a nickname to distinguish them from the many other sects and groups that were in the city of Antioch. But even though given to them as a nickname, the name reflects the fact that the followers of the Lord Jesus were beginning to have an identity of their own. The name “**Christian**” would reappear two more times in the Bible.

The second time would be in *Acts 26:28* and that would be approximately **15** years after the first appearance. The context in *Acts 26:28* is Paul’s imprisonment in Caesarea and the invitation governor Festus extended to King Agrippa to listen to Paul’s defense against the charges of the Jews. Paul’s defense was a mixture of personal testimony of why he was a Christian and a presentation of the gospel. When Paul was finished, King Agrippa was obviously under conviction and he said to Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.”

The final appearance of the name “Christian” is in *1Pet.4:16*. Peter wrote, “but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in

this name.” Peter’s letter was written approximately **20** years after the name “Christian” was first given in Antioch. These two usages reveal two facts : **(1)** that the name “Christian” had gained acceptance among the followers of the Lord Jesus; and **(2)**, that the non-Christian world had come to understand what the identification meant.

### **Conversion To Christ.**

The question arises : how does one become a Christian? Among all the religions of the world, Biblical Christianity stands alone with its answer to this question. I am including here all the apostate, heretical, cultic Christian groups among all the religions of the world. In our world, Hindu parents give birth to Hindu children. Muslim parents give birth to Muslim children. Buddhist parents give birth to Buddhist children. Roman Catholic parents give birth to Roman Catholic children. We can go on and on with the list.

But according to the Bible, one can only become a Christian by conversion to Christ. Biblical Christianity is not inherited from your parents. Christian parents do not give birth to Christian children. They give birth to sinners, totally depraved sinners; sinners who are dead in their trespasses and sins; sinners who are rejecters of God and His word and salvation in God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. As sinners, they will have to be converted to Christ through the preaching of the gospel, repentance of their sins and putting their faith in Christ to save them.

There is no evidence in the Bible or in the history of the apostolic church that children of Christians were baptized or confirmed or whatever else. There is no evidence that the apostles even regarded the children of Christians to be better than the children of non-Christians. If the children wanted to become Christians, they had to listen to the gospel being preached or taught. They had to understand the gospel. They had to believe the gospel. And they had to show evidence or fruit that they were saved. If, from a human standpoint, children met the conditions and displayed the evidences of conversion to Christ, they were baptized subsequent to conversion.

We do not refuse to baptize, confirm, dedicate, or lay hands and pray over babies or older children because we are Baptists. We refuse because we have no such commands in God's word. We refuse because the interpretations of the so-called precedents used to justify these actions are highly questionable. We refuse because these practices have become additions to the gospel and in some cases have replaced the gospel. We refuse because children are born into this world as sinners and we do not baptize sinners. We baptize sinners who have repented of their sins and put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to save them.

Biblical Christianity stands alone in its doctrine of conversion to Christ. From a human standpoint, conversion to Christianity is a decision to be made. It is a choice rooted in an act of the will. It is a choice rooted in the understanding of gospel teaching. There can be no vagueness here. There can be no generalizations here. The gospel concerning God, Christ, man, sin, repentance and faith must be presented, understood, embraced and acted upon.

### **Change.**

This brings us to the primary point I want to deal with today. If you could use one word to sum up what Biblical Christianity is all about, what will that word be? My answer is the word **“change”**. Biblical Christianity changes you. Christian conversion changes you. The word **“conversion”** points to **“change”**. You do not change yourself. Biblical Christianity is not about turning over a new leaf. Biblical Christianity is not about improving your lifestyle, your personality, your habits, etc. Biblical Christianity is not a positive thinking program. Biblical Christianity is not about renovating a person's character through education, training and a change of environment.

Biblical Christianity is about God and God radically and permanently changing you in Christ, God remaking you in Christ, God working in your life such a revolution in Christ, it is literally miraculous.

Christian salvation is, first and foremost, a work of God in you, a work He began in eternity, a work He continues in time and a work He completes when Christ returns. Turn to *Phil.1:6*. Paul wrote, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” “**He who began**” is a reference to God. When God saved you, He was simply continuing the good work in you that He began in eternity. Your salvation in Christ is described as “a good work”. It is a good work God began in eternity when He chose you in Christ and predestined you to adoption as His sons and daughters. (*Eph.1:4-5*).

Notice the verse says God “will perfect” this good work He has begun in you. The verb “**perfect**” means to carry on to completion and to finally complete. Day by day God will carry on this good work He began in you. Day by day God will be putting all the finishing touches to this good work He began in you. This good work of salvation in you will be completed in “the day of Christ Jesus”, that is, in the day Christ returns the second time. On that day God’s completed work of salvation in you will be declared to be “**very good**” because on that day you will be glorified with Christ. (*Rom.8:30*).

**There is no good work of salvation that God has begun that He fails to complete.** The emphasis here is on God and not angels or men. The good work of salvation that God begins, God will complete. The guarantee is God and there is no guarantee outside of God.

Paul’s confidence about what God will do was not self-generated. This confidence and assurance was given to him by the Holy Spirit and it is the Holy Spirit who inspired him to write about this confidence and assurance. The Holy Spirit wants us to have this confidence and assurance. “I am confident” is the same Greek verb found in *Rom.8:38* where it is translated, “I am convinced.” Turn to *Rom.8:38-39*. (**read**). In both instances the verb is perfect tense which points to the permanence of the confidence and assurance we ought to have.

The conclusion is that we must never question God's ability to complete the good work of salvation in Christ He has begun in any sinner. We must never question God's willingness to complete the good work of salvation in Christ that He has begun in any sinner. The sinner whom God has saved in Christ will be completely and finally perfected in that day of Christ's glorious return. The sinner whom God saves in Christ will never be lost and can never be lost. This fact is clearly confirmed in **Rom.8:38-39**. There is absolutely nothing that "will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This brings us to the second passage I want us to consider, **2Cor.5:17**. Please turn to this passage. From **Gen.chap.1** we learn about God's work in creation. Each day's work was declared to be good. And when God finished His work of creation, He declared it to be "very good". This first creation fell into sin because of Adam's disobedience to God.

In **2Cor.5:17** Paul spoke about a different kind of creation work that God is doing in this world. Paul wrote, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." If we translate literally, we get this : "Therefore, if anyone in Christ, a new creation; the old things passed away, behold, new has come." The better translation is "a new creation."

Sinners are the old creation. Sinners belong to the old fallen creation. Sinners belong to and live under the dictates of the old order that took effect after the fall. Conversion is God's work of new creation in the sinner. Here is the change : when God saves the sinner he/she ceases to be old creation and becomes new creation. The change does not stop there. The change goes further. When God saves the sinner He removes or frees the sinner from the old order and the satanic, fleshly, corrupt dictates of the old order and puts the sinner into the new order and under the dictates of the Holy Spirit-controlled godly new order. In **Col.1:13** we are told that God rescues us from the domain of darkness, that is, Satan's domain, and transfers us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

Paul wrote, “if anyone is in Christ.” God’s new creation work of salvation is never done apart from Christ. It is done “in Christ.” We have seen in our studies in *Ephesians* that God’s saving work began in eternity with election. (*Eph.1:4*). But it was election in Christ. God chose us in Christ. It is through Christ God predestined us to adoption as sons. (*Eph.1:5*). It is in Christ we have redemption through His blood. (*Eph.1:8*). *Eph.1:13* says, “having believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.”

**Philip Hughes** wrote, “in Christ” *sums up as briefly and as profoundly as possible the inexhaustible significance of man’s redemption.* “**In Christ**” we have all the blessings of salvation. “**In Christ**” could mean united to Christ. “**In Christ**” pictures Christ as a sphere and it means we are located in Him.

“**In Christ**” God worked in you a radical change of new creation that results in a radical change in your life. This change is not a renovation of the old. This change is radical because it replaces the old creation with a new creation. This change is not physical. This change is spiritual. This language of new creation is found again in *Gal.6:15*. Paul wrote, “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.” God had begun to save the Gentiles through the preaching of the gospel. But the Judaizers came along and were saying to the Gentiles that believing the gospel of Christ was good but not enough. They were saying, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” (*Acts 15:1*). Paul’s response was that circumcision was a physical act that brought outward change. Outward changes were useless in the salvation of sinner. What the sinner needed was inward spiritual change that is so radical it must be called “a new creation”.

In *2Cor.4:6* the apostle likened the true conversion experience to the event of the first day of the creation week, when God summoned light into being. Paul wrote, “For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness”, is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Let us examine the word “new”. The word “new” does not focus on time. It focuses on quality. It describes that which is qualitatively new. God is creating in Christ a qualitatively new people for Himself. In this new creation work of salvation something radical happens. Paul wrote, “the old things passed away”. The verb Paul used points to definiteness and finality. There is a definite moment in time when “the old things passed away”. And there is a finality with which “the old things passed away”.

There are many today who cannot identify that specific moment in time when “the old things passed away” from their lives. But they know it has happened and they can testify to the finality with which it happened. They know they are different. They are not perfect but they are different. You hear them saying things like : *I do not do that anymore. I do not live that way anymore.* The people around them know they are different. Peter said in *1Pet.4:4*, “they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you.” But having tasted and seen that the Lord is good, those who are a new creation in Christ know there is no going back to the old things which passed away.

What does Paul mean by “the old things”? The answers given by the various writers are the same even though differently expressed. **Hughes** says “the old things” are “*the distinctions, prejudices, misconceptions, and enslavements of the former unregenerate way of life.*” **Garland** describes it as “*everything that controlled the individual’s pre-Christian existence.*”

He added, “*The individual’s whole being, value system, and behavior are ... changed through conversion.*”

“The old things” refer to the whole set of conditions and relationships that marks unbelievers in their unregenerate state. In this unregenerate state they conduct their lives “according to the flesh”, that is, they are governed in thought and action by the desires of “**the flesh**”. In this unregenerate state they make their value judgments according to the flesh. In this unregenerate state they assess people, things, events, and issues by the external worldly corrupted standards of the flesh. (**Harris**).

A detailed description of the working of “**the flesh**” is found in *Rom.8:1-11*. What is the flesh? The flesh is human nature as corrupted, directed, and controlled by sin. Paul tells us the flesh is hostile towards God and His word. The flesh cannot please God. And “the mind set on the flesh is death”. (*Rom.8:6*). “The mind set on the flesh” is the mind controlled by and that lives under the dictates of the flesh. Note carefully that Paul did not say that the mind set on the flesh leads to death or results in death. Paul’s point is that the mind set on the flesh is death itself. It is in a state of spiritual death.

Paul wrote, “the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” The old is gone. The control of the old has been brought to an end. The lordship of the old has ended. The old has been replaced by the new. There is an important principle of replacement here that the Christian must bear in mind. God takes away the old creation and replaces it with the new creation. God takes away the old order and replaces it with the new order. God takes away the old things and replaces them with new things.

In the same vein, the Christian is called upon in *Eph.4:22-24* to put off the old and to put on the new. When God saved you, He gave you the firm foundation of the changes He made. Now you must go through the lifelong process of building on this firm foundation with the changes God requires of you to make. Once again you are brought face to face with the principle of you following God’s example or mirroring God’s actions.

Far too often Christians put off a sinful habit but do not put on the righteous habit. They remove a sinful practice but do not replace it with the righteous practice. Far too often Christians behave like the man Jesus described in *Matt.12:43-45*. (**read**). The Christian removes a sinful habit. He sweeps out the garbage and puts things in order. But then he leaves the space he has cleaned unoccupied. And then he wonders why, after a short period he falls again into the same sin and sometimes may even fall in a worse manner. Let us picture your Christian life as a brand new house God has given to you. God didn’t merely take you out of the old shack you were living in. He also burned the old shack and

all its old contents to make sure of two things : (1) that you did not return to the old shack; (2) that you did not bring any of the old contents into the new house. So now you are in the new house but it is empty. It has no furniture. This is where most Christians fail.

They do not set out to find and bring the new God-approved furniture into the new house of the new life God has given them. They sit around and wait for God to bring the new furniture to them. When God does not do so, they go out and find second hand and old furniture they are accustomed to and comfortable with and bring them into their new house. And then they sit and wonder why their new house is an unchanged mess. And then they come and say, *“Pastor, I do not understand. I thought my life was supposed to change.”* Hold that thought right there for a moment.

Paul said, “behold, new things have come.” The verb “have come” is perfect tense. The new has come and come to stay permanently. The old was brought to an end decisively and with finality. The new has come with foundations dug and laid deep, as far as into eternity past. The roots of the new are not the fibrous roots of your actions in time. The roots of the new are the tap roots of God’s actions sunk deep into eternity. **Garland** noted that the individual’s whole being, value system, and behavior are changed through conversion.

**Harris** wrote, *“When a person becomes a Christian, he or she experiences a total restructuring of life that alters its whole fabric – thinking, feeling, willing, and acting. Anyone who is “in Christ” is “Under New Management” and has “Altered Priorities Ahead”.*”

“Behold, new things have come.” **“Behold”** functions as a sign calling attention to what has happened. It sounds an unmistakable note of spontaneous jubilation. It is the sudden note of triumph. There may be here also a bit of personal testimony from Paul of the glad surprise he experienced after the Lord Jesus reconciled him to God. Behold! Take note! In the words of the chorus, *“I’m a new creation; I’m a brand new man.”*

In closing this study, I have some questions. *Firstly*, are you a new creation in Christ? I am not asking you if you are a perfect person. I am not asking you if you are struggling with sin. I am not asking you if you are failing in your struggle with sin. I am asking if you know that God has brought about a basic, foundational, radical change in your life. I am asking you if you are conscious of the fact that God has wrought in you a basic, foundational, radical transformation of your heart, mind, will and desires.

Let us not play word games here because the eternal welfare of your soul is at stake. The questions demand a simple yes or no answer. There is no room for answers like : I do not know; I am not sure; I hope so; I would like to think so. Have you experienced in your heart surprising conviction changes towards things in this world you once enjoyed but never paused to question the morality of such things? Have you experienced surprising changes towards the things of God that you were never inclined to, had no interest in and never believed you could enjoy doing?

Have you experienced surprising changes that is akin to Paul's concept of "**behold**", surprising changes that are a kind of billboard sign that calls your attention and/or other peoples' attention to what is happening in your life? The day you repented of your sins and put your trust in Christ to save you, did you experience changes in your life at the most foundational levels? I am speaking of spiritual changes you cannot seem to run from, changes that have made your conscience alive in ways that have surprised you, changes that now make you uncomfortable where you were once comfortable, changes that stand in your mind like a flashing red light that you are not able to disconnect.

If your answer is "**NO**", then you have no basis for saying that you are a Christian. And you need to repent of your sins and cry out to God for mercy. Like the publican, you need to cry out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (*Lk.18:13*).

*Secondly*, let us go back to the imagery of the brand new house. If God has saved you, He has moved you out of the old shack you were living in and given to you a brand new

house to live in. That's change that is basic, foundational and radical. The rules have also changed. He has given to you a new set of rules to live by and He has given to you the ability to live by those rules. Now, you can go out and get the new free furniture from God's warehouse and live by His new rules and completely enjoy living in this new house God has given to you.

Or you can do what so many professed Christians are doing : going back to the devil's warehouse and buying old, dirty, second-hand furniture and bringing them into God's new house and using them to help you live according to God's new rules. But here is your problem. That switch in God's house will not light up that old kerosene lamp you bought from the devil. That plug in the wall will not light up that old coal-pot the devil sold you with glowing assurance that it was perfectly made for the plug in the wall. Those water fixtures will not work with your old tub and scrubbing board. And then these people begin to think, *"this Christian life surely isn't working out."*

And then the devil comes along and says, *"It's not your fault. It's not the fault of those good things I sold you. It's God's fault. He gave you a new house with features you know nothing about and you do not know how to live in that house. He has made the standards too high for you. He has made you promises that He is not keeping. You are not blame. God is to blame. He set you up and then abandoned you."*

Turn to ***Psa.1:1-3.*** (read). The problem is not with God and what God did. The problem is with the person who is trying to live in God's house by the devil's rules. The problem is with the person who is trying to live in God's house with the counsel of the wicked and in fellowship with the wicked. The man who enjoys living in God's new house and who prospers is the man who delights in God's rules and lives by God's rules.

How are you living in God's new house that He has given to you? There is only one way to live in that house, and that is, God's way. And God's way is neither oppressive, nor burdensome, nor out of your reach.

Listen carefully to God's word from *Isa.55:1-3*, "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live."

God's salvation warehouse is open and everything is free. There is nothing sub-standard in this warehouse. There is nothing old in this warehouse. But it's all free. All you have to do is come and load up and delight yourself in God's abundance. So why are you believing the devil's lie and shopping for expensive, sub-standard, old things in the devil's warehouse?