



# Christianity

## How Do You Get There?

### How does one become a Christian?

A simple question - for which there should be a simple answer. However, that isn't the case. In fact, there seems to be as many answers as there are denominations. So, who is right? More importantly, what do you do if you're just trying to find your way to Jesus?

There is one place we can find answers that every denomination agrees upon: the Bible. This is the one safe place to look for an answer to our question: **"How does one become a Christian?"**

If you carefully read through the New Testament<sup>1</sup> you will see a pattern emerge for what people did to become a Christian. In fact, when Christianity began (before there were denominations) there was only one single, simple answer for how one becomes a Christian.

**Let's see what that answer was...**

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<sup>1</sup> This is the name given to the last half of the Bible. This section begins with the book of Matthew and concludes with the book of Revelation. This is the section that focuses on Jesus Christ, Christianity, and the Church.

## Becoming a Christian involves making a commitment.

Christianity is really one simple thing: a relationship.<sup>2</sup> Like any relationship, it requires commitment - a commitment to the other person and to the relationship. If the relationship is to be healthy, this commitment needs to be shared by both people.

God has already shown His commitment to a relationship with you. He did this when He allowed His only son to be executed to pay for your sins and make this relationship possible!

*John 3:16 (NIV)*

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

If God has already made such a costly commitment, isn't it only fair that He asks you to make a commitment to this relationship as well?

**How do you do that? There are two steps you are to take:**

First, you accept Jesus' offer of forgiveness. This means you are ready to:

### **Admit your mistakes and failures. (sins)**

This means you realize you can't earn your own way into Heaven. You need Jesus to save you by taking away the guilt (consequences) created by your sins. He can do this because He already died to pay the penalty for your sins.

*Romans 5:8 (NIV)*

*"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

### **Make a commitment to follow Jesus, just like the first disciples.**

Throughout His time on earth, Jesus asked people to *"come, follow me."* Those who did were called *"Christians."* It is no different today. If you want Jesus to be your savior, you are also committing yourself to follow Him. He will become the leader of your life, the model you try to follow.

If you are willing to take these two steps, it means you are becoming a part of God's family. Think about that - it's unbelievable - God adopting us, you!

*John 1:12*

*"Yet to all who received him, (Jesus) to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

*Galatians 4:4-7 "But when the time was right, God sent his Son, born of a woman, . . . to redeem those who are sinners, so that we might receive the full rights of children. Now since you are children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spir-*

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<sup>2</sup>Christianity is often seen as a religion, traditions, a value system, even a lifestyle. But all of these ideas miss the simple truth that Jesus Christ came to earth so that people could have a personal relationship Him and with the God who created them.

*it who calls out, "Dear Father." Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a child; and since you are a child, God has made you also an heir."*

What an amazing offer! God is willing to forgive you and include you in His family. He is even willing to make you an heir!

## So what do you actually DO?

Where do you sign-up? What do you actually DO? If we go back to the New Testament there is a simple process that was followed by people who wanted to become a Christian. Like any relationship, this process involved both people. God does some things and you do some things to formalize this commitment.

When the process is completed, both you and God have pledged your commitment to each other. Your sins are forgiven, and God has accepted you as one of His children, a co-heir with Jesus! **Here are the five actions that you and God take to show your commitment to each other:**

## Five steps that show God our commitment

### 1. BELIEVE

As with any relationship, what's most important is what's on the inside. You must **BELIEVE**. This doesn't just mean you agree to some facts: that Jesus really lived on earth, was born in Bethlehem, etc. To **BELIEVE** is a commitment that you are ready to acknowledge Jesus as your savior and your leader. (Lord)

*John 1:12 (above)*

*Romans 10:9-10 (NIV) "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. {10} For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."*

This inner commitment will change your whole life. Your attitudes towards others, yourself, Christians, even your enemies will be different. Your actions will change as well. With Jesus as your leader, you will be guided by a whole new standard.

This is the inner part of the commitment process that you must be willing to make. Without it, all the external actions in the world really don't matter. But once you make this commitment, some behavior changes will be unavoidable. That is why the other steps of the commitment process involve actions, things you actually DO.

## 2. REPENT

Secondly, you **REPENT**. This is an ancient word we don't use today, but its meaning is simple. To **REPENT** means "*to change direction.*" It's like making a 180° turn when you're driving.

*Acts 2:37-38 (NIV)*

*"The crowd asked Peter, 'what do we do to be saved?'*

*Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"*

If God is given control over your life you will begin to see things differently. Things which you previously thought were harmless will become wrong. You will begin to evaluate your lifestyle with the simple question, "would Jesus do this?" Sometimes your answers will lead you to make changes in your attitudes, your priorities or your actions. Such changes are **repentance**.

There is a reason why God included repentance as a step in becoming a Christian. It is by repenting, by making these changes, that we prove to God, to ourselves, and to others that we really are serious about our commitment to be a Christian. If the changed actions aren't there, then our commitment isn't real.

*James 2:17 (NIV)*

*"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."*

## 3. CONFESS

**CONFESSION** is the third act that shows our commitment to follow Jesus. To **confess** is to be willing to take a public stand for Jesus. It is your way of saying to the world that you are now a follower of Jesus.

*Romans 10:9-10 (above)*

Today, Christians do this by standing in front of others and stating their belief in Jesus and their commitment to follow Him. In former centuries such an act might have brought imprisonment or even death. Still people confessed Christ. You need to ask yourself: are you serious enough about following Jesus that you will take a public stand for Him. If your answer is "yes," then you're ready to **Confess Christ**.

The first time you stand before others to declare your commitment to Jesus can be scary. But God asks you to do this to prepare you for other times in your life at work, with friends, etc. when you will be asked to take a stand for Jesus.

When you make such a public commitment, Jesus is honored. In fact, He promises that He will also "confess" you when you stand before God!

*Matthew 10:32 (NIV) ""Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."*

## 4. BAPTISM

The fourth act that you do as a part of this commitment process is **BAPTISM**. While baptism has become a church word, originally it was a commonly used word: "*to submerge under the water.*<sup>3</sup>" If you think about the symbolism, you can see how immersion powerfully communicates the spiritual realities of becoming a Christian.

First, it symbolizes how your past sins are being removed. They are washed away, just as the water washes your entire body. You get a fresh start. You are forgiven. God now views you a perfectly clean and totally good person - as right as Jesus!

*1 Peter 3:21 (NIV) "and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also -not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"*

Secondly, **baptism** symbolizes your willingness to die. You are "buried" under the water to show how you have given up control of your life. You have allowed Jesus to become the leader of your life. Not only this, but baptism also shows how God has given you a whole new life!

*Romans 6:4 (NIV) "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."*

**Baptism** is a very simple yet dramatic experience. Powerful spiritual forces are at work when you are baptized. In many ways, this is God's public adoption ceremony!

*Galatians 3:27 (NIV) "for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*

## 5. TRANSFORMATION

The fifth and final act of commitment is God's, not yours. Remember, this is a mutual commitment that God is making as well.

When you have committed yourself to God, both inwardly in your mind and heart, and outwardly through confession and baptism, then God makes His commitment to you. He begins His work of **TRANSFORMATION**. To do this, God gives you a part of Himself - to live within you - His Spirit.

*Acts 2:38 (NIV) "Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

God gives you His Spirit for several reasons: So that He can have a close relationship with you. So that He can help you with guidance, wisdom, and strength. Finally, so that you can know that you have truly been adopted, that you ARE a child of God.

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<sup>3</sup>In baptism today, another Christian will pray with you, ask you to make a public confession of your faith in Christ, and gently lower you beneath the water, doing so in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They will then raise you back up out of the water - and you are baptized!

*Ephesians 1:13-14 (NIV) "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, {14} who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory."*

With the coming of His Spirit inside you, God will begin the life-long process of transforming your life for the better. Your past will not have to control you. Your character will improve. You will find peace even in the middle of life's struggles. You will become skilled in sensing God's presence and hearing His leading in your life. The list of benefits goes on and on. You are a child of God! You are on the greatest adventure imaginable!

*2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV) "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*

**Welcome to the Family!**

## Some Possible Questions:

**1. "But what if I don't know enough yet? There are some things I need to change before I am ready to become a Christian"**

Becoming a Christian is not the final step, it is not a "graduation." It is a beginning, a birth! The only thing you need to know is that you want Jesus to be your Savior and the Leader of your life.

Everything else will come later. All the things that might concern you now - God wants to help you change. He doesn't expect you to do it on your own. To be honest, if you try and do it on your own, you will probably never be good enough! Don't wait. Start building your relationship with God now. Let Him help you!

**2. "What if I haven't done all five of these acts of commitment? Are you saying that I'm not a Christian?"**

No! God didn't make us His judges. What He did do was ask us to tell others about Jesus and how to become a Christian. We are committed to doing this as honestly and accurately as possible.

The five steps outlined here are what we find in the Bible. If we didn't teach all five, we would be failing God - and we won't do that.

Could there be exceptions? Certainly! Jesus made one on the cross. (Luke 23:43) That is for God to decide, not us. But remember, exceptions by their very nature only serve to prove the "normal" pattern.

Andover Christian is committed to teach and invite you to follow the normal pattern the first Christians practiced in the Bible. If you think about it, that is the one certain way to know you are a Christian - without any doubts or uncertainties about exceptions.

### 3. *“Why don’t you accept other forms of baptism, like some churches do?”*

The simple truth is this: there was only one type of baptism practiced in the Bible - immersion. All the other forms of baptism have been added by churches during the last 2,000 years. Immersion was what John the Baptist was doing, what Jesus Himself experienced, and what every convert to Christianity in the New Testament did.

Our intent is not to be narrow, judgmental, or exclusive! Our intent is to return to the type of baptism that was practiced in the church when it began. Now, you have every right to challenge us on such a bold claim. Here are some facts that support immersion as the one original form of baptism:

The word used for baptism in the original language<sup>4</sup> of the New Testament means “to plunge beneath the water.” There were different Greek words that meant “to sprinkle” or “to pour.” These words are never used for baptism in the New Testament. The Greek Orthodox Church, which clearly understands the original language of the New Testament, still practices immersion as their form of baptism today. Orthodox Jews today still baptize converts to Judaism. This is what John the Baptist was doing 2,000 years ago. This baptism is done by complete immersion. The forms of baptism that have been added throughout history can be easily documented. The records clearly show when they were first approved by church councils. All of them were added hundreds of years after the New Testament was written. Bible Scholars from virtually every denomination agree that the form of baptism practiced in the New Testament was immersion.

### 4. *“What about babies, aren’t they supposed to be baptized?”*

If baptism is an outward act of an inner commitment between a believer and God, then the baptism of babies doesn’t make sense. They can’t believe. They are not developmentally capable of making a commitment to follow Jesus - or anyone.

Also, babies are not sinners in need of forgiveness. They do not even know or understand right from wrong. The Bible clearly states that were they to die, they would join God as sinless humans - they would not go to Hell.

*Ezekiel 18:19-20 (NIV) ""Yet you ask, 'Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?' Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all my decrees, he will surely live. {20} The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him."*

It is only as we understand right from wrong and choose to do wrong that we sin. It is at that point when we need forgiveness - when we need Jesus to be our Savior. It is no accident that this is also the developmental stage at which a growing child can learn about Jesus, understand the concept of commit, and make a conscious decision to follow Him - and be baptized.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The original New Testament documents were written by the Apostles and others in Greek.

<sup>5</sup>Some church traditions teach that infants must be baptized, not because they are sinners, but because their parents were sinners. This concept, made popular in the 5th Century by Augustine, holds that the guilt of sin is inherited by a baby. Ezekiel 18:19-20 [see above] directly contradicts such a concept.

### 5. *“Where does the ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’ fit into this process?”*

The fifth act of commitment, **TRANSFORMATION**, begins when the believer is given God's Spirit. The phrase **“baptism of the Holy Spirit”** is one way the New Testament describes this experience. There is not one example in the New Testament of God giving a new believer only part of His Spirit and then later giving him or her the rest of His Spirit.

It should be noted that once a believer has God's Spirit, a variety of new things begin to happen, as stated previously. As we gain experience, we become better able to listen to the Spirit, work with the Spirit, and be more aware of His leading. This growing awareness and sensitivity to the Spirit is not that a sign that the believer is receiving more of the Spirit. Rather, the Spirit is being allowed to guide more of your life.

### 6. *“I was told to just pray a prayer, what’s wrong with only doing that?”*

This is undoubtedly the most common form of making a commitment to Christ practiced in American churches today. There is certainly nothing wrong with prayer. We firmly believe that prayer should always be a part of any person's conversion experience.

Again, however, the pattern laid out in the Bible does not stop with prayer. In fact, prayer is rarely mentioned in connection with anyone's conversion. The only specific actions mentioned in the process of commitment are faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. To ignore these and only focus on prayer is a decision without biblical support. Thus we won't do that.

## **One Final Thought:**

If you take the time to read about every conversion to Christianity found in the New Testament<sup>6</sup>, a wonderful truth emerges: God's original plan was that the process of becoming a follower of Jesus would be something simple and yet profound - something that anyone could understand. Yet it is also a life-changing experience that will never be forgotten.

Tragically, 2,000 years of church history have turned this simple process into a source of controversy, confusion, and conflict. Some traditions have made it an ordeal, while others have made it almost a trivial act.

We are excited that you have an opportunity to return to the simple, yet profoundly life-changing process God originally presented in His Word. If Andover Christian can help you make this commitment to Jesus, we would be honored!

written by Dr. Jim Conner

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<sup>6</sup>Andover Christian has a complete list of conversions in the book of Acts in chart form printed and available.