How to Become a Christian

Here's how to know your sins are forgiven and that you'll live forever in heaven after you die.

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God created each of us and loves us unconditionally (see John 3:16-17). God is holy and perfect, however, and in our natural state we cannot fellowship with Him or know Him intimately. We—all of us, without exception—have sinned and violated His holy character (see Romans 3:23), which is reflected in His law, including the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). While we might not think of our violations as being all that extreme, even the smallest infraction in our eyes is enough to make us guilty before God. The penalty for sin is death—and not just physical death, but spiritual death, eternal separation from God forever (see Matthew 7:21-23, especially verse 23, and Matthew 25:31-46, especially verses 41 and 46; also see Romans 6:23).

We would be in a totally hopeless situation were it not for God's great love, which compelled Him to send His own Son, Jesus Christ, to live a perfect life and to be executed on a Roman cross in our place (see 1 Peter 3:18). On a Passover Friday, Jesus shed His blood on our behalf and died an unspeakably horrible death, but He rose from the dead the following Sunday morning, demonstrating God's approval of His holy life and of His death as payment for our sins.

Death in the electric chair is far more merciful than death by crucifixion, but the idea of dying to pay the price for being guilty of wrongdoing is the same. *Yet Jesus was innocent!* He experienced the ultimate in capital punishment to benefit sinners who deserved be executed themselves! That means you and me!

Salvation, therefore, is nothing that we earn or deserve. Rather, it is a gift God offers to us freely (see Ephesians 2:8-9). The catch is that we have to receive it. Jesus died for all, but He won't force His way on anyone. Having sent His Son to die in our place, God waits for us ask Him to forgive us of our sins. Will we receive God's free gift of eternal life? Giving an affirmative answer to this question first means we understand God can forgive us only on the basis of Jesus' substitutionary death. We also must believe Jesus is God, that His death is adequate payment for our sins, and that He rose from the dead (see Romans 10:9-10).

It isn't enough simply to understand these things or even to believe in our minds that they're true. We need to make a personal decision about what we're going to do with Jesus. We must receive Him into our lives and rely on Him for eternal life. When we do, we are born spiritually into God's family (see John 1:10-13). This necessarily involves turning away from our sins and, as we've said, depending on Jesus and Jesus alone (see Luke 13:1-5; 1 Timothy 2:5) for forgiveness and eternal life with God in heaven. Once we have received new life in Christ and been forgiven, we live our lives to please Him—not in order to be saved, but because He already has saved us (see Ephesians 2:8-10, especially verse 10).

Although receiving Christ into one's life is just like receiving a gift (we do it as an act of the will and do not have to say anything), many people find it helpful to pray a prayer asking Christ to come into their lives. They might pray something like this.

> Dear Jesus, I am a sinner and guilty before You and God the Father. I'm sorry for my sins and want to turn away from them to You. I believe You are God, that You came to earth and lived a holy life, and that You were executed on a cross in my place. I also believe You rose from the dead. Thank You for dying for me. I receive You now into my life and ask You to forgive me and make me a new and different person. Amen.

The Bible declares in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." If you sincerely looked to God and received Christ in your life, you can know that your sins are forgiven and that you now have new life in Him (see 1 John 5:9-13).

One more thing! Becoming a Christian also means becoming a part of God's family, the church. If you are not involved in a local church, begin participating in one where the Bible is upheld as God's Word, fully reliable and trustworthy; and where Christ is upheld as Savior and Lord, the only way to know God and receive eternal life (see John 14:6). Remember that a Christian cannot grow spiritually without support, encouragement and help from his or her brothers and sisters in Christ (see Hebrews 10:24-25). Welcome to God's family!

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