

Back to Basics pt. 1
“How to be Sure You’re a Christian”
1 John 5:10-13

Intro

Ex. Vince **Lombardi** and the Packer’s training camp (prop: Football)... No matter how professional you are, you always come back to the basics. It is the same as a follower of Jesus. If you ever get away from the basics you will suffer.

Ex. **House**: foundation: if the foundation is shaky, the rest of the house will fall/

Ex. Building blocks/ABCs – must always know your ABCs to read and study and learn.

Today we begin a very important series. **Back to basics**. In this series we are going to be looking at those elements in the Christian life that serve as the foundation upon which we all should build our spiritual house. Your house will only be as strong and solid as the foundation upon which it is built on.

And we can’t get any more basic than our topic today: **How to be sure you are a Christian?** What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Knowing for sure you are saved and have a relationship with God is the very beginning point and that is what we will be dealing with today.

I will be sharing a lot of scripture today, because when it comes to this very important topic, it ultimately doesn’t matter what I think or what some church or denomination says, what matters is what the Bible, the Word of God says, because this (Bible) is the final authority when it comes to matters of life, death, eternal life and God!!!

So, here we go. I will be answering **3 very important questions** today:

1. What does it mean to be a Christian?
2. What is required in becoming a Christian?
3. How can we know for sure that we are a Christian?

A verse I want to start off with is. The Bible says that we are to:

2 Cor 13:5-7

5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-unless, of course, you fail the test? 6 And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.

This message will help each of us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith To see if we pass the test, and the test is could be called the salvation test. Are you truly a Christian? Will you go to heaven when you die? There is nothing more important than what we learn today, because this determines where you and I spend all of eternity and eternity is a long time.

This sort of begs the question: can we know for sure?

Ex. Newsweek article

Yes, we can know for sure otherwise Paul would not talk about passing the test and also this verse is very helpful:

1 John 5:11-14

11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 **He who has the Son has life**; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may **know that you have eternal life.**

Rom 8:16-17

16 **The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.** 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Both of these verses show us that we can have assurance of salvation; we can know for sure that Jesus is in our heart; we can know that we are going to heaven when we die; we can be certain that we are a child of God and thus a true Christian. We can have that inner witness in our spirit.

TS So, let's go right into our first question:

1. What does it mean to be a Christian?

As I answer this I am going to use a lot of different words and phrases, some of which are considered **Christian clichés** today, but I use them because they are biblical words, they will help answer our questions today, but when I use them I will be sure to explain what they mean. These are the most commonly used phrases in the bible in explaining what it means to be a Christian.

Saved

The word was used in the 1st century in talking about being rescued or delivered from some danger: saved in war or saved at sea. When the bible uses it, it refers to being saved from sin. The bible says:

Luke 19:10

10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to **save** what was lost."

John 3:16-17

16 "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. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, **but to save the world through him.**

1 Tim 1:15

15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to **save sinners**—of whom I am the worst.

Jude 22-23

22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 snatch others from the fire and **save them**; to

Acts 2:21

21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be **saved**.'

Acts 2:47

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being **saved**.

Rom 5:8-9

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be **saved from God's wrath** through him!

Titus 3:5

5 **he saved us**, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

Acts 16:29-30

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**"

You can see how popular and biblical this word is? What does it mean? It means to be saved from our sin. The bible makes it very clear that the chief issue that keeps us from God, that separates us from a relationship with God is sin. There is this huge canyon between us and God that we cannot cross on our own..... so how can we be rescued or saved from sin? Only God can remove it and only the blood of Christ can cleanse of that sin stain.

So, what is it that saves us? It is the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the work of the cross. This is why:

Rom 5:9

9 Since we have now been **justified by his blood**, how much more shall we be **saved** from God's wrath through him!

Eph 2:13

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been **brought near through the blood of Christ**.

Col 1:20

20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by **making peace through his blood, shed on the cross**.

The cross of Christ is where our sins were dealt with and paid for. It is the cross of Christ where our salvation was bought. Jesus on the cross said "**it is finished**" – paid in full.

This is why we cannot be saved by our good works but only through the work of Christ. This is why Paul said I boast only in the cross.

(We are lost and dead in our sin. To be saved means to be rescued. To be forgiven, to be made alive.

Ex. Someone dead at the bottom of the ocean . . . God comes to us in Jesus; He goes to the bottom and rescues us and puts His life in us.

TS And when we realize this and embrace the cross and place our faith in Christ, we are:

Born Again

Pres. Jimmy Carter may have popularized this phrase when he was Pres. but Jesus is the one who first used it. In:

John 3:3-6

3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is **born again**."

1 Peter 1:23-24

23 For you have been **born again**, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Titus 3:5

5 **he saved us**, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of **rebirth** and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

What does this mean? We are born the first time in the flesh and we enter the world sinful and separated from God. Though we have a body; our spirit is dead in sin (**Eph. 2**); when we receive Christ the bible says that our spirit is made alive and the Holy Spirit enters our spirit; therefore we go from being spiritually dead to spiritually alive. It is kind of like this:

Prop: Balloon: this balloon is our spirit. It is here but it has no air in it. We are born into the world with a spirit but it is dead in sin and separated from God and unable to have a relationship with God unless it is born again. To be born again is to receive Jesus into our life which means the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual life and comes to live in us (*blow up balloon*)

Jn. 3:6 flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

TS Notice that something had to come into this balloon for it to have life, and for us it involves receiving Christ, asking Him to come into our lives through the Holy Spirit, so our next phrase is:

Receive Christ

Jn. 1:12 as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become children of God.

Rev. 3:20 Behold I stand at the door and knock....opens the door, I will **come in to him**.

You and I have to open the door of our life. He died for us; He pursues us; He knocks on the door of our lives, but we must open the door and invite Him in. I like this phrase because it really gets at the truth that salvation is a gift and all we can do is receive it.

Eph. 2:8-9 we are saved by grace through faith, that not of ourselves it is the gift of God, not as a result of works lest anyone boast. Salvation is a gift;

Prop: gift

paid for. Waiting for us to simply receive it.

TS And when we do receive Christ and invite Him in, we begin a personal relationship with Christ.

Personal Relationship with Christ

To be a Christian is to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. A daily relationship. A growing relationship.

Come out: Unfortunately, here where so many miss it. I sure did for the first 17 years of my life, despite being a pastor's kid. You can have religion. You can go to church. You can be baptized and confirmed and go through all the motions and yet not be a Christian, if there is no personal relationship. A true Christian is one who has a daily, personal relationship with God whereby we are His child and He is our Father and we live for Him daily. This is why

Jn. 1:12 ... children of God.

Rom. 8 in our spirits we cry "Abba Father" – like a Father-child relationship
Jesus said

Mk. 12 Love the Lord your God with all your heart

This is a relationship characterized by love and trust and obedience and growth and intimacy.

Now there is a very important thing to note here: With all of these words and phrases we have seen today: saved; born again; in Christ, receive Christ; personal relationship These happen at a **moment in time**. You were not saved and then you are saved; you were dead in sin and then you are born again in Christ. You don't have Christ in your life and then you do. You had not received him and then you do. You did not have a relationship and then you did.

Now I have one more I want to cover and listen carefully because this one, too, begins at a moment in time but with it comes the ongoing walk, the ongoing journey. The phrase is "follower of Jesus".

Follower of Jesus

You can read my tract for a more detailed treatment of this but suffice it to say: when Jesus called his disciples he used the phrase “follow Me”

Luke 9:23

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and **follow me.**

To follow Him means you do make a decision to begin the journey (that is called **justification**), when you are saved, born again, receive Christ. But it doesn't end there, rather it begins there. The rest of the journey is one of following Jesus, walking with Jesus, becoming more like Jesus, and that is called **sanctification**. A Christian is someone who has received Jesus as Savior and is walking with Him as Lord. A follower of Jesus.

Ex. Marriage: I have often likened the Christian life to a marriage. After all the Bible calls Christians the bride of Christ. Marriage is a relationship. It begins by getting to know each other and then deciding to say “**I Do**”; that is when the marriage begins and then it is a lifelong relationship of trust and growth and greater and greater closeness.

This is what it means to be a Christian!!!

TS So, what is required on our part for this to occur?

2. What is required on our part to be a Christian?

Notice I said our part, because the Word of God makes it very clear that **ultimately salvation is God's doing:**

God initiated. The Father sent His Son.

Jesus did the work to save us by dying on the cross. We cannot save ourselves.

The Holy Spirit makes us aware that we are sinners and in need of Christ.

The ability to repent and believe and receive is a gift from God.

John 6:44

44 "No one can come to me unless the **Father who sent me draws him,**

Acts 16:14

14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. **The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.**

Acts 13:48

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and **all who were appointed for eternal life believed.**

We call this prevenient grace. God giving the grace even to believe. And this is one of those divine mysteries. What is God's part and what is ours and even though what we do

is given by God's grace, we still are called to do certain things and yet those are not works but rather a response to God's grace.. And what are those things the Bible says we must do? Because in

Acts 16:30-31

30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, **what must I do to be saved?**"

We are going to see 3 things: repent, believe and receive. The first thing is to

Repent

Do want to have "20/20" spiritual vision? Here's how:

Acts 20:20-21

20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. 21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in **repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.**

Repentance means to be sorrowful for your sin and to turn. To turn from your sin and receive Jesus. To turn from self to become a follower of Jesus. It implies surrender. It implies that you are not only receiving Christ as your Savior but also beginning the journey of making Him Lord. Jesus told His 12 to leave the old and follow Him. It is not just praying to get a ticket to heaven and fire insurance so to speak, it is a decision to follow Jesus.

I believe this is **one of the most neglected teachings** today and why we see so many false conversions today. By false conversions I mean people who pray a prayer asking Jesus into their life but then you never really see a change. The bible would say that if there is no change then there is no Christian. If there is no change there is no salvation. If there is no baby there is no birth! You can tell a tree by the fruit. If there are no apples there is no apple tree.

Mt. 7:21 Jesus said, "not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven."

Ex. My question to lost people: are you willing for Jesus to change this area? If not, you are not ready.

TS The 2nd thing and these all go hand in hand. They are almost all different ways of saying the same thing.

Believe

Right after they asked in Acts 16 what must we do to be saved, the answer was:

Acts 16: 31 They replied, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved**

The word **believe** in the original greek means to trust in with all your heart. It did not mean merely to agree intellectually or have a mere assent or acknowledgement of facts about Jesus, because

James 2:19 you believe God is one, you do well, the demons believe and shudder. Mere intellectual assent to facts does not save anyone. I call this missing heaven by 18 inches.

To believe means to trust in Christ alone for your salvation. To transfer trust from self to Christ.

Ex. 2 chairs: EE question: why should I let you into heaven?

This is why

Rom. 5:1 having been justified by faith

Eph. 2:8-9 we are saved by grace through faith.

Gal 2:16

16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by **faith in Jesus Christ**. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Notice it says to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not just a vague, general “I believe in God”. No, it is faith in the finished work of Christ. We come back again to the cross and the blood of Jesus. We place our faith in Christ alone, in what He did on the cross for us.

TS the 3rd key word is receive

Receive Christ

This is probably the most popular word today. It comes from

John 1:12

12 Yet to all who **received** him, to those who **believed** in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

I personally like this term because it gets at the biblical truth that salvation is a gift and all we can do with a gift is receive it and say thanks.

So, 3 things on our part that go into salvation: Repent, Believe, Receive.

TS Have you done that? If not, you can today!

2 Cor. 6:2: Today is the day of salvation.

If we have done that, then can we know for sure that we are a Christian? Yes, but how?

3. How Can We Know We are a Christian?

We have already seen that we can know for sure, but how? Very simply, we can know for sure based on the trustworthiness of God and His Word. Let me show you how this works: Please turn to 1 John 5:11

1 John 5:11-14

Let's walk through this: if you have Christ, you have eternal life. How do you have Christ? Repent; Believe; Receive. If you have done that, then you can be sure based on this promise and others in God's Word. Not based on anything else. What about the fruit issue? As you walk with Jesus and follow Jesus, you will see fruit and change that will

simply confirm that you are a true Christian, but you don't initially depend on feelings. You depend on the trustworthiness of God and His Word.

How do I know I am saved? Because I have repented of my sins, I am trusting in Christ alone to save me from my sin; because I received Him into my life when I was a senior in high school and because I am following Him today, and He says right here in His Word if I have Christ I have eternal life. I also trust in

Rev. 3:20 when He says I stand at the door of your heart and knock I did ask and He promised He would come in.

One more issue we need to address: what about the issue of fruit and a changed life? What about someone who says they are a Christian but show no evidence of it in their life? These are hard calls. Jesus said you can tell a tree by the fruit. If no evidence then they may not be a true Christian. Part of knowing is that they are a follower of Jesus. On the other hand, the bible does speak of those who are saved but slip away; the key here is "are they feeling convicted of their sin? Does the person feel bad for the sin you are now living in? If not, then they probably are not a true Christian. Are they being disciplined by the Lord? If not, **Hebr. 12** says you are in illegitimate child and not a true son.

So the way to know for sure is that you have repented of sin, you are trusting in Christ alone for forgiveness of sin, you have invited Christ to come into your life, and you are following Him. And then based on His many promises in His unfailing Word, you can have assurance that you are a Christian.

If there is any doubt, make sure today by praying this prayer:

Prayer of Salvation

Lord God, I admit that I am a sinner. I have been going my own way and not following You. Thank You for loving me and sending Your Son to die for my sins. I turn from my sin and selfishness. I trust in the finished work of Christ to save me from me from my sin. I receive You as the forgiver and leader of my life. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Make me the kind of person You want me to be. Thank You for saving me. Amen

Let's bow in prayer right now and any who need to pray this from your heart as I go through it phrase by phrase

Pray

If you are certain of your salvation, then thank God right now and rejoice in the blessing of being saved....

Communion Introduction: and now we get to celebrate our salvation by partaking of the Lord's Supper/communion ... if the servers would come now. God gave this as a physical way to be regularly reminded of what He did for us to save us:

1 Cor. 11

This is only those who are true, born again, saved people.... Come whenever you are ready, being sure you have prepared your heart.

End:

- you might want to get the tape of today's message and give it to someone you know who is unsaved or unsure of their salvation.
- Meditation verse for the week: keep it with you ... put somewhere you will see