

## Question #13: What Does it Mean to Become a Christian?\*

Those of us who call ourselves evangelical Christians and follow a biblical worldview understand that the notion of becoming a Christian is a hallmark of our faith. Yet, differences exist within evangelicalism and fundamentalism over how this process takes place. Does God perform a secret work in my heart that inevitably leads me to believing and trusting in Him? Or, do I decide to place my faith in Jesus for salvation to which God responds by saving me? While many Christians hold to one or the other of these options, neither one truly captures the Biblical teaching on the subject of becoming a Christian. The Bible describes a process in which God is calling a peculiar people to Himself, yet He holds individuals responsible for their choice of whether or not they believe His Gospel message.

### I. God's Calling

- A. General Calling -- a broad sense of the biblical concept of "calling" that refers to any preaching of the gospel to anyone, regardless of whether or not they respond in faith
  - 1. This calling takes place every time the gospel message is presented because the gospel possesses the powerful and miraculous truth about God's grace that brings about human salvation (Romans 1:16-17).
  - 2. The Gospel message is the vehicle used by God to call people to Himself (2 Thess. 2:13-14).
  - 3. The preaching of the Gospel message is essential for anyone and everyone's salvation (Romans 10:14-17). It is in the presentation of the message of the Gospel that people are enabled to believe (Rom. 10:17).
- B. The Believers' Unique Calling -- an act of God, speaking through the human proclamation of the Gospel, in which he uniquely summons a group of believers to Himself.
  - 1. This type of calling is descriptive only of believers, as they are uniquely described as God's "called" ones (Rom. 8:30).
  - 2. The Bible presents a number of truths concerning God's uniquely "called" ones:
    - a) We have been taken out of darkness and placed into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).
    - b) We are called "into the fellowship of his Son" (1 Cor. 1:9).
    - c) We are called "into his own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12; 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3).
    - d) We belong to Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:6).
    - e) We are called to be "saints" (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2).

\* The material in this handout is a summary of chapter thirteen, "What Does it Mean to Become a Christian?" in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. by Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 90-94.

## Question #13: What Does it Mean to Become a Christian?\*

- f) We have come into a realm of peace (1 Cor. 7:15; Col. 3:15).
- g) As a result of our being uniquely called by God, we possess freedom (Gal. 5:13), hope (Eph. 1:18. 4:4), holiness (1 Thess. 4:7), patient endurance of suffering (1 Peter. 2:20-21; 3:9), and eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12).

### II. The Believer's Response

- A. While God is calling all people to repent through the Gospel message (general calling), He is uniquely calling a special group of followers to Himself as they respond to His Gospel message by trusting in it for salvation (Rom. 1:16; 10:9-17).
- B. The human response that God calls us to in no way involves any work we do. Thus, we contribute nothing to God's gracious gift of salvation (Eph. 2:8-9).
- C. Rather, God asks us to believe and trust in what He has done for us through the work of His unique Son.
  - 1. Salvation does not come through simply knowing the facts of salvation or agreeing that the facts are true. It requires trust.
  - 2. John 3:16 states that those who don't perish and possess eternal life are those that "believe in" Jesus Christ. This "believing in" or trusting involves two aspects -- repentance and faith (Acts 20:21).
    - a) Repentance -- a conscious decision to turn away from my sins
    - b) Faith -- turning to Christ to forgive my sins by admitting that I can't save myself and believing at the same time that only Christ can.
    - c) These initial aspects of belief (repentance and faith) become a pattern for the rest of my Christian life (Col. 2:6).

### III. The Presentation of the Gospel

As believers in Jesus Christ, we are given the responsibility to take the truths concerning the salvation He provides to others (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Because the Gospel message is so important and effective, we must make sure that we present its truths. There are three key elements that need to be explained in any presentation of the Gospel:

- A. An explanation of the facts concerning salvation:
  - 1. All people have sinned (Rom. 3:23).

\* The material in this handout is a summary of chapter thirteen, "What Does it Mean to Become a Christian?" in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. by Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 90-94.

Question #13: What Does it Mean to Become a Christian?\*

2. The penalty for our sin is death (Rom. 6:23).
  3. Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins (Rom. 5:8).
- B. An invitation to respond to Christ personally in repentance and faith
1. Christ called on people to personally respond to his message when it was presented (Matt. 11:28-30).
  2. Likewise, hearers of the Gospel today are called to respond in belief (Rom. 10:9-13).
- C. A promise of forgiveness and eternal life
1. God promises that those who respond to the Gospel “will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
  2. He will not deny any such believers (John 6:37).

\* The material in this handout is a summary of chapter thirteen, “What Does it Mean to Become a Christian?” in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. by Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 90-94.