What Do All Those Words Mean?

Richard Owen Roberts

A lot of New Testament words are being thrown around loosely and used interchangably as if they all mean the same thing—words like *new birth, conversion, salvation, regeneration, justification, sanctification, glorification.* What exactly do these words mean?

It is helpful to think of an umbrella and to call the umbrella *salvation.* Under the umbrella term of salvation a whole series of biblical concepts can be arranged sequentially in order of appearance in life.

As far as the individual believer is concerned, the work of salvation begins with the *new birth* when God quickens the person, replacing deaf ears with those that hear, blind eyes with those that see, and a heart of stone with a heart of flesh. The gospel then has meaning and the cross of Christ can be and is responded to in repentance and faith. In repentance there is a turning away from sin and in faith a turning toward the Lord Jesus Christ. In response to believing faith, God then *justifies* the believer and makes him legally as if he had never sinned.

At the same time he receives the spirit of adoption and knows himself to be a child of God. This inner work of God takes on outward visible aspects in a *conversion* or turn-around in life. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" Obviously that can be seen. A process of growth and development then begins that is called *sanctification.* This is like a plant that in time produces a bud and eventually a beautiful flower is seen. Daily the Christian is to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ until the very beauty of Jesus is seen in the life. This process must continue from the point of justification until glorification.

The process of salvation is magnificently concluded in *glorification,* when the person dies and enters glory, or when Christ returns in glory and gives his people their incorruptible spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15).

It is important to remember that all of these words are part of a single process called salvation. Jesus Christ is our Savior, "the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Hebrews 5:9). He is our justification, our sanctification, and our glorification.

Practical Christianity.

Who Can Become a Christian?

Clark H. Pinnock

Who can become a Christian? The answer in a nutshell is that anyone can. Anyone who wants to can "take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17). Whosoever will may come. Everyone has an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Matthew 22:9).

The Bible's teaching about God's gracious desire to save everyone is too strong and clear for us to accept the notion—which many hold—that God is free to give and to withhold salvation as he pleases, and that he gives it only to special individuals whom he has selected.

Paul said that God wants everybody "to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Peter added that God is "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Through Ezekiel, God announced: "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Jesus told us who can become a Christian. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). It seems that God quite sincerely wants everyone to be saved. "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). On another occasion Jesus said, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32).

So strong indeed is the scriptural teaching about God's universal saving will that people have sometimes even concluded that all will in fact be saved, that no one at all will be lost. As Paul said, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Because of Paul's teaching elsewhere—as when he warns about God's wrath that is coming (1 Thessalonians 1:10)—we know there will be wicked who perish and are banished from God's presence. But we should not lose the marvelous scope of Scripture. God's intention is to save the human race, not a pathetic little segment of it. "Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Romans 5:18).

According to this kind of theology, we ought to think of being saved as the normal outcome and being rejected as the exception, and not the other way around. I think we have erred in thinking of condemnation as the ordinary and salvation as the extraordinary outcome of the history of divine redemption.

Who can become a Christian? According to the New Testament, anyone can. It is certainly true that not all do make the decision to give their lives over to God. Some stubbornly insist on going their own way. "Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John *336).* Such people will not enjoy the salvation God has for the world. "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

But a difficulty comes to mind—not on God's side, who is on record as desiring the salvation of the race, but on man's side. Has not sin affected human nature so as to make it impossible for individuals to save themselves and even to turn to God for salvation? Are people not so hopelessly alienated from God and dead in their sins that they have no ability and no desire to

turn to God for help? Is it perhaps true that anyone may but no one actually can become a Christian?

If we focused only upon man's lost condition, we might very well suppose that bare invitations to eternal life would be useless and would fall upon deaf ears. But we must remember God's powerful Word. His invitation to save sinners carries with it all the resources necessary to see it happen. God's grace creates within humans the power to respond to or resist his love. He works in their lives to draw them to himself. When God calls a sinner to turn to him, he gives the sinner the strength to do what he requires.

God does not abandon sinners in their depravity, but visits them with his grace and goodness. He gives them good gifts out of his abundant creation and sends his Spirit to draw them back to himself. Stephen made that clear in his last sermon: "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" (Acts 7:51).

God works in sinners to draw them to himself. It does not follow that they will return. His drawing of them, being the call of love, is not irresistible. Love which did not leave the option of refusal would not be love. God deals with us as persons. We are saved not by force, but by faith, the free decision to trust in God.

Who can become a Christian? Anyone can, because God's grace closes nobody out. There are no limits to his grace except those that sinners impose upon themselves. Jesus Christ, our Advocate, has become "the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Salvation is so broad as to encompass potentially the entire human race. So let us enter in, and let us invite others to enter the kingdom of God.

What Is a Christian?

YFC Editors

A Christian is one who...

- *has faith* John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; Hebrews 11:1
- *has commitment* Luke 9:57-62; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 10:37-39; Proverbs 3:5-6
- *demonstrates by example* Galatians 5:22-23; James 1:22-27; James 2:17-20; Romans 2:15; 1 John 2:5-6
- *shares God's Good News* Matthew 10:32-33; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15;

Practical Christianity

Becoming a Christian

J. I. Packer

How does a person become a Christian? The process is not difficult to understand. It can be explained as easily as *ABC:*

A represents the truth that all have sinned. It calls me to *admit* my sins.

To be a Christian, I must acknowledge my sins.

B stands for *belief* in the Lord Jesus Christ. I must call on him, receive him, trust him, and worship him, recognizing who he is and what he has done for me.

C stands for something Paul requires in Romans 10:9—I must *confess* that the risen Christ is my Lord and Savior. That seals the transaction.

When I have admitted my sins, believed in Jesus, and confessed Christ as my Savior, I am a Christian, ready to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Practical Christianity

Chapter 1.
Christian Growth Begins at Christian Birth

- **Why would I want to become a Christian?**
- **How do I become a Christian?**
- **In what areas will I grow?**
- **Will I ever be perfect?**
- **What is the difference between maturity and perfection?**

How Does a Person Become a Christian?

Luis Palau

Millions of people claim something has happened that has changed their lives, brought them profound peace of mind, and assured them about the future. People have faced death singing, entering eternity with confidence.

Some with this unusual confidence say they have been "saved," others use the term "born again," and still others say that they have "found eternal life." All these terms are synonymous, for they each have to do with three aspects of life: being saved from past guilt, being delivered from

present thought patterns, and gaining assurance for the future and for eternity. All these mean that a person has become a Christian.

At this point, let us look at some things that do not guarantee a person is a Christian. Being born in America or the British Isles, living a decent life, thinking positively, going to church, giving to charity, taking the sacraments, praying—none of these is a guarantee. Not even believing in God makes a person a Christian—many people of other religions believe in God.

What is a real Christian? First, a real Christian has been born into the family of God. Just as we are born into our human family, so we have to be born into God's family. The Gospel of John puts it this way: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12, 13). In other words, we are all created by God as his creatures, but we only become members of God's family when we open our hearts to Christ, believe in him, and receive him into our hearts.

Second, a true Christian is walking in the way of life. Jesus said there are two roads: the broad road leads to destruction, and the narrow road leads to eternal life (see also Deuteronomy 30:19; Jeremiah 21:8). The narrow road leads to a clear conscience and liberation from habits that destroy us. We do not have to walk under clouds of guilt—real or imagined. When you have found Jesus Christ and have been forgiven for your sins, you have absolute peace with God. You know that your sins were dealt with on the cross and taken away. You are free to live a new life of moral cleanliness—this does not mean perfection, but it does mean walking in the light and desiring to be pure.

Third, the true Christian has eternal life. Such a promise comes into its fullness when we die, but we can enjoy it now, here on earth. Eternal life lives in our hearts, convincing us that we need never feel alone or empty. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). You can have the assurance of eternal life because Christ lives in your heart. John Calvin called this the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

Now that we have a clear picture of what a Christian is, how does one become a Christian? There are three basic steps. Step one is to admit that your sins keep you away from God. The Bible says there is no difference among people because we all have sinned and fallen short of God's perfection (Romans 3:9-23). We can deny how we miss the mark, but as the apostle John put it, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives" (1 John 1:8, 10).

Step two is to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to lead us back to God. We do not have to understand it all, but we do need to believe it. I do not understand how electricity or radios work, but I trust that they work and enjoy their benefits. "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:3-5).

Step three is to receive the Lord Jesus as Savior by making a personal decision. The individual must take a step of faith, which is receiving based on believing. It is not enough merely to believe; the gift of eternal life must be grasped. When I travel and bring home a present for my wife, all she has to do to enjoy the gift is to take it and say thank you. To receive Jesus Christ is similar. By faith you say, "Thank you, Lord. I receive you into my life." At that moment the gift of God, which is eternal life in Jesus Christ, is yours.

This last step demands a personal decision. It is an act of the will, for we can either reject or receive Christ. Too many people depend on inherited faith—a secondhand faith. But only authentic faith leads to life eternal.

Two Women, One Savior

Luis Palau

One night in November 1971, I was preaching in the capital city of Lima, Peru. In the crowd was a woman who was a guerrilla fighter and had killed policemen and civilians alike. She heard the Word of God and before the next sunrise had knelt by her bed and, with little knowledge of the Bible, received the Lord Jesus as her Savior.

That woman's life has been completely transformed by Christ. Now she is taking care of two thousand poor children by feeding them a full breakfast. She has built schools for them in the slums of Peru and started churches too.

I also know of one of the wealthiest women in the British Isles. Despite her breeding and education, she was filled with fear of the occult and of death. She is now living a life of peace and freedom from fear—belief and trust in Christ have brought her this. She is now leading many others to the Lord.

In the worst slums of Latin America or the wealthy circles of Great Britain, people are experiencing eternal life—promise for the future and hope for today.

Practical Christianity.