

Becoming A Christian

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by S. Michael Durham
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Acts 2:37-47

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." 40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

It is no dispute that Jesus Christ founded Christianity. He is the rock and the cornerstone of our faith. After He left this earth to return to His Father, He gave His commission to the apostles that they were to take care of His church. They were now in charge of the flock. Our text is from the event called the Day of Pentecost, a very important day in the history of Christianity. It was the day that God filled His church with power, giving them the ability to do what He had called them to do. And so, we see in our text a new beginning of the church. Before this, they were just a ragtag group of men following their Teacher through the countryside, but after this day the Bible tells us 3000 were added to the church. What an amazing start. Now, with this sermon, we see something happening, something extraordinary, something they had never seen before. Jesus may have had His multitudes with thousands following Him, but after one particular sermon the crowds left Him, the multitude was diminished and there were just a handful following the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, I've said all that to say to you this morning, we should give considerable weight to the beginning of the church because the beginning establishes the precedents of Christianity. What takes place here, in this event, as described by Doctor Luke, will tell us much about what the Christian faith is, what it's like, and how His people called the church operate.

It's very important in this hour of confusion that we look at this text and allow the Lord to tell us what Christianity is and what it means to become a Christian. I say that because there is a great deal of confusion today. It seems to me, that with all of the teachers and the multiplicity of "religious leaders" that there is a confusion about the land.

I just got back from Toronto, Canada, and there discussed faith and the work of God among a certain ethnic group. I heard that among this ethnic group who have come to Christ there is great confusion, so much so, that some of the religious leaders there were questioning the validity of many people's faith. You say, "We have no business doing that. 'Judge not and you shall not be judged.'" But the same Christ who said that also said in the next breath that we are to be very careful about how we apply the Gospel and to whom we give it, because we need to give judgment.

He even says to the religious leaders in John 5 that when you judge use a righteous judgment. What does that mean? It means you don't let things go. You don't say, "Que sera sera, whatever you want to believe is fine, we're all going to the same place, we all believe in the same God, we all believe in Jesus, it doesn't matter, let's just all get along." In the name of getting along we have compromised what true Christianity is until there are very few people who understand it and have therefore experienced it.

Would you agree with me that God is the founder of the Christian faith? It seems to me there are certain privileges and prerogatives that a creator holds. This is, namely, that He gets to define whatever He has made. He gets to establish the purpose for which He made something. If He designed and built the church, then it seems to me quite logical and quite fair to God to let Him establish the ground rules. Not you, not me, not some denomination, not some famous celebrity preacher, but Jesus Christ—only He can establish what this thing is all about. Only Christ has the prerogative and the right to tell us who are His followers and who are not, and He will always do so according to the Bible.

God has not left us without a road map or perimeter of safety, a place where we can go back and say, "Thus says the Lord." You might think, "No, the Bible is open to interpretation." I disagree. I doubt you read your high school text books that way. I doubt that you read the driver's license manual that way.

What would happen if you wanted to interpret the driver's license manual anyway you wanted to? I'll tell you what would happen, you wouldn't be driving today. You wouldn't have earned your driver's license. No, you read it knowing that you had to glean from it the proper interpretation. What's the proper interpretation? Whatever the author meant.

Friends, God has written this Book. He inspired people to write it and they didn't often know what they were writing but He moved them along by the Spirit and He has preserved this Book. Do you realize that thousands of people have died to make sure a copy of the New Testament could be given to this generation? Men have literally died because they

would translate from one language to another in environments where religious leaders in powerful establishments were fearful that their power would be eroded when other people could read the Bible.

I think of William Tyndale, who translated the Bible from Latin. How would you like to read the Latin Bible? Thank God there was a William Tyndale back in the late 1400s who said, “I believe every English plowboy should be able to read the Bible in their own language.” He translated the New Testament and for that they hung him. They were so aggravated by him that they dug up his dead body and then they burned it to make the point.

Friends, this Book has been brought to you at a high price, you better pay attention to it. It would do you well to not dismiss it but to listen. And the right interpretation is the author’s interpretation. In this Book Christ has told us what it means to be a Christian. What is it? What is a Christian and how do you become one?

I. A Christian is Someone Who Has Been Confronted by God

This is the beginning of what it means to be a Christian—you have personally been confronted by God. Not by a preacher, not somebody who stuck a tract or a piece of Gospel literature under your nose and was somewhat obnoxious about it. No, God confronts all of His people and there is an initial confrontation.

Where do I get this? From our text. Listen to what the response of the people was when they heard Peter’s sermon in verse 37.

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart . . .”

Something happened to those people as they were listening, something they could not explain. Did you notice this morning the baptism candidates, trying to explain what happened to them, found it difficult to find words? That’s what happens when God confronts you. This is the Almighty God, He is mighty and holy. You know you are in a presence that’s not just human, it’s extraordinary, above us, greater than you, transcendent.

A. The Beginning of Christianity in a Person’s Life is Always God Initiated.

You didn’t initiate, God did. It was God who went out looking for the lost sheep. It was God in the woods that day looking for our brother, Daniel. Daniel wasn’t looking for God, God was looking for him and found him. That’s true for every believer here. God found you. He initiated the relationship you have. He’s the suitor, you’re the one being pursued.

Friend, if God is pursuing you this morning, what an awesome privilege. The Creator of the universe, the One who sent galaxies into their place in the sky, the One who made the sun and the stars and all the planets pursues us. I’m telling you, if God is pursuing you, this is an amazing thing

that He would seek you out. Who are you that He would seek you out and look at you and say, “I want him. I want her”? But that’s what this book says!

That’s the amazing thing about Christianity, that God pursues His people! That He so loves us that He would send His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, would have eternal life. Friends, it wasn’t you going to the cross. It wasn’t you climbing Mount Calvary. It wasn’t you nailed to those rough-hewn timbers by Roman soldiers. It was Christ. This was the purpose for which He came. He came pursuing you. He came initiating a relationship with you.

You see this when Paul writes to the Thessalonians in the first epistle to the Thessalonians.

“For our gospel did not come to you in word only,”

This is what I’m concerned about at this very moment. Right now I’m concerned that what you are hearing is not just my voice. It’s always the concern of my prayer up to the very moment I’m in this pulpit and even while I’m in this pulpit. Believe you me, I’m praying right now that you’re not just listening to a man’s voice that while I’m speaking you would encounter God. I pray that this Gospel wouldn’t come in word only but that God is confronting you.

You say, “Well, I’m already a Christian, what does this have to do with me?” Oh, dear friend. Rejoice! What has this got to do with you? You’ve experienced this! Remember what you’ve had. Have you left your first love? Have you forgotten from which you have fallen? Return and rejoice this morning. Remember what He has done. The Bible says the Gospel didn’t come to you in word only.

“but also in power,”

What does this word *power* mean? Is it charisma? Friend, you’re listening to one of the least charismatic people I know. You can carry all of my charisma in a thimble. I’m usually black and white and to the point and often the point is too sharp. That’s not the power he’s referring to. If that’s the reason you accepted Jesus—because some other human being’s magnetism so overwhelmed you—I would ask you to reconsider and make sure, because Paul isn’t talking about human power, He’s talking about supernatural power. He’s talking about the power of God.

“and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. 6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,” (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6)

God so confronted these people that what happened to them led friends, families, coworkers, to pressure them, persecute them, and antagonize them, but they had the joy of the Holy Spirit.

It’s not just some religious exercise. It’s not just coming and then genuflecting, bending the knee, and saying some prayer after some preacher. No, this is God.

Even Jesus, speaking to one of the most religious men of His day, said the Christian life is so mysterious and hard to explain that He said it like this:

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

This is a work of God.

What does He do when He confronts a person in order to make them a Christian? I would suggest to you that first, **He reveals the truth of who He is.**

This is where it always begins. As these 3000 people were listening to the Apostle Peter preach, they knew they were not just listening to some fishermen from Galilee. They knew there was something beyond and bigger than this human being—this was God. They sensed God all around them and they saw a glimpse of who He is. This is the truest knowledge you will ever experience. Have you been confronted by that kind of knowledge?

I'm sure some of you have gone beyond high school and gotten your college degree. Some of you may have a post-graduate degree and you use that knowledge to further you and your family. Very good. That's wonderful. But I'm telling you, you still don't know true knowledge until you've met God because God has all knowledge. You, sitting here before me, can know certain things but you cannot know all things. It's a human impossibility. You will never know all things.

But when you're confronted by the God who knows all things, who is everywhere at the same moment, the Creator God, you are confronted by Someone who is incomprehensible, someone who will overwhelm you until you are broken.

I'll never forget the day God saved me. There was a presence that came into that room—it was so holy, so overwhelming, and frightening. I had never felt what I felt that morning. I had never felt a presence so powerful, so pure, so holy, and so loving, and I was frightened by it. We're always frightened by what we don't know. People would rather be told by the doctor that they have cancer than to go on and not know, because what we don't know frightens us.

I had never experienced what I experienced that day, something so loving and so pure and so holy. I was confronted by God. I saw Him, not with my eyes, but truth flooded my mind. When you see God as He is, my dear friend, there is always **a revelation of who you are.** That's why we're frightened, because we're not like God. He's holy, we're not holy. He's loving, we're not loving.

The people you have in your life, the ones you call loved ones, I'm telling you, dear friend, until Jesus changes you and saves you and makes you His own, you do not love those persons for their own sake, you love them for your own sake. It's a human impossibility, it is psychologically and emotionally impossible to love someone for their sake, until pure and holy love infiltrates your heart.

When you see God for who He is, you see yourself for the very first time. No wonder these people were cut to the heart.

B. The Work of God is Discomforting.

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart . . .” (v. 37)

God does not comfort the sinner. We're living in a time where religious leaders are saying, “We want to attract people, so we've got to learn how to make them comfortable.” So we want to change our worship services so they're more entertaining. We'll bring in drama teams, we'll get nice theatrical lights, we'll make people feel very comfortable. We'll never talk about sin or fornication, immorality, adultery, lying, or thieving. We won't talk about things that make people uncomfortable. We don't want anybody leaving feeling guilt, because guilt would be uncomfortable, so let's just talk about the love of God.

Nothing has been more deceiving than that idea. In our text we see the precedent of Christianity and do you see comfort, do you see pleasure, do you see them dancing and feeling wonderfully loved? Do you see them feeling gloriously happy that they are there that moment? No, the Bible says they were cut to the heart, they felt pain, they were uncomfortable, because they were confronted with their sin.

The Apostle Peter accused them, “You took this Jesus, whom God anointed and crucified Him. You murdered Him,” and it drove into their hearts like a stake. You may say to me, “Oh, well, God won't grow your church if you speak like that.” Friend, if God wants to grow this church, He can do that. If He wants us to be like the early church and have thousands, well, He is more than capable to do it. That's God's business because Christianity begins with God. I have no fear of not reaching people for Christ. We baptized five this morning. That's pretty good for a church our size. But this is all in the hands of God.

In fact, look at the last verse of our text, “The Lord added to the church daily those who are being saved.” It was God doing that. I would rather have one sinner that God has saved and brought here than a hundred people who make professions of faith and say they are a Christian but they're still the same, lost in their sin.

The work of God is discomforting. The problem is that people live their lives never disrupted from the normality of life. Let me explain. Many of you are just living your life, you've charted a course and are doing the best you can. Some of you haven't even done that. You have no idea where your life is going or how it's going to end, you're just living it. You're just experiencing it and we think that's normal, that's how everybody is. Not a Christian.

Here we are, simply living life. We have problems, we have difficulties, but everybody has them. We chalk that up to say that's just life. When God confronts a person, He interrupts your normal. He turns your world upside down. We've heard that from several this morning, haven't we? He

turned their lives upside down. Or should I say, He turned their lives rightside up. Because what we call normal is abnormal. What we call the good life is the hard life. The Bible says the way of the sinner is hard.

C. The Work of God Brings a Strong Desire to Change.

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37)

These people were asking Peter and the apostles, “We know we can’t live in the normality of our lives. We just can’t live life the way we’re going. We know your sermon, we’ve experienced God’s presence, we know there is something supernatural going on here and it has exposed us. What have we got to do? What changes do we need to make?” When you are confronted by God, you know you can’t remain the same. Something has to change.

II. A Christian is Someone Who Has Changed

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 2:38)

Peter speaks of this change as a turn in the general direction of one’s life. It’s the word *repentance*, which literally means to turn 180 degrees and go in the opposite direction.

A. A Christian is Someone Who Has Turned From Sin.

Before you begin congratulating yourself and saying, “Well, that must mean I’m a Christian because I don’t do some of the same things I used to do. I have changed. I don’t do this. I don’t do that. I don’t stay out late partying. I’ve kind of cleaned up my act a little bit. I have changed. That makes me a Christian.”

Be careful. To repent means not only to turn from sin but this kind of turning is a change, first of all, in your mind about your sin. You no longer think about it in the same way. I remember almost 30 years ago, when my sin consumed my thinking. My sin controlled my life.

I rationalized in my mind and justified what I did and what I didn’t do. But when God began a work in me, I didn’t just stop doing those things. No not at all, my mind changed about them. I could no longer justify them. I could no longer argue that I was just in doing those things.

Not just that, but my heart changed toward those things. I used to love my sin. I used to drink it like water. I got satisfaction from it. I got a thrill. I got excitement. I got pleasure. But the day God confronted me, even my affections, my likes, my dislikes, completely changed. Before I was saved, God was a means to an end. Let me explain.

I was religious, I was in the church, but I was using God to get what I wanted. I would do what I thought He wanted me to do because I believed that my goodness obligated God to me. But what I really wanted was that I would be in heaven and I would escape hell. That was the whole motivation of my religious life and duty. The day God confronted me, the day God changed me, my affections for God changed. He was no longer a means to my end, He became somebody close to me, dear to me. He became my Father.

I was scared to death of God before I got saved. I knew that you had to toe the line, you had to do all the right things and avoid all the wrong things. The problem with me was that I couldn't do all the right things and I couldn't avoid all the bad things. I was scared to death. To me, God was somebody to be frightened of. But that changed the day I got saved. Something happened in my heart that changed the way I felt. It was then that I knew the love of a Father for a son.

Not only that, this turning changed my will, that is my choices, my decisions. I no longer did the same things because I didn't want to do the same things. We heard that today in several of the testimonies. "I can't help doing what I'm doing," Daniel said. "I can't help it. It just happens." What does he mean? Is he meaning that there's some power taking over him and he's had some kind of close encounter of a third kind? That he's inhabited by some kind of alien spirit? No.

What he's saying is he has turned. The confrontation with God so changed him that his desires changed, his wants have changed. He delights in the things of God. They satisfy on the deepest level in a way he's never experienced before. Why would you want to go back to the world after that? When you've tried everything in the world and nothing satisfies, why would you want to return to it?

B. A Christian is Someone Who Has Turned From the World.

"And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation (the world).'" (Acts 2:40)

What does the "world" mean? It does not mean this earth upon which we live but rather the system by which we all live. He's not talking about the planet, because God made the world, He's talking about human society. Peter is saying, "You've got to save yourself. Run from this world, this perverse generation. Flee it because I'm telling you, it's going to be destroyed."

This is one of the images you see in *Pilgrim's Progress*, written by John Bunyan. It starts with this character named Pilgrim, who is reading a book, which represents the Bible. In the book, he is warned that the city in which he lives, the City of Destruction, is going to be destroyed. The city represents society operated by the genius, lusts, and desires of men. This society in which we're living is controlled by a spirit, the spirit of this present evil age. Pilgrim packed his bag and left the City of Destruction.

A Christian realizes that while he may be a citizen in this world, and while he may be an American and love his country, in the end, God is going to destroy this earth with all its institutions and societies. This world will be destroyed and God will establish His kingdom.

The Christian no longer lives for this world. The Christian's goal is far higher than this world.

“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Galatians 6:14)

There has been such a change in me that all my eggs are not in the basket called the world. I don't bet on this world anymore. I don't base success of life by the world's standard. No, I bet success on the Word of God—Jesus Christ.

A Christian is someone who has seen the totality of life. Wouldn't it be something if God, right now, showed you your entire life and what it's being ultimately lived for? Your goal, how you define success? Well, a Christian is someone who has seen the totality of life. They don't know how it's going to unfold but they've seen the totality of it because they've seen this present world will not survive the judgment of God. He who lives according to this world will be destroyed along with it, but he who does the will of the Lord will abide forever. That's what they've seen and they've believed it.

He or she has seen that life does not end here, but continues after the death of the body. For this reason, the Christian makes preparations for living after death. They lay up riches ahead.

Some of you are saying within your heart and if you could talk to me and be so bold you would say, “Listen, don't talk to me about life and success. I know what it's about. I've achieved it. I have a measure of happiness today and I've achieved it. I've worked hard and gotten ahead, my standard of living is better than my parents. I am doing quite well.”

What will you do with your successes in the hour of death? Answer me. What happens when you close your eyes in death and everything you've lived for you have to leave behind? Is that your definition of success? Is that what you're living for? No, my friends, the moment you close your eyes in death, life does not cease to exist. There is an eternal, immortal life, and you will either live it with God or you will be separated from Him forever. I could sit down and weep about what that looks like, to be separated from God forever.

A Christian is someone who has changed from their ultimate goal. They understand what's really important, what real success is. They're not living just for here. They're living for Christ here and for Christ there.

III. A Christian is Someone Who Has Received the Spirit of God

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ (Acts 2:38)

What does that mean, “gift of the Holy Spirit”? What is Peter talking about?

Did you know you have a spirit? I’m talking to a roomful of spirits. I know we’re getting close to that bewitching hour this time of year and everybody is thinking about spirits, ghosts. In fact, the old King James used the word *ghost* instead of *spirit*. Somebody thought one day, “You know, maybe it’s not too wise to call the Holy Spirit a Holy Ghost because most people don’t understand what that means anymore and they’re thinking about some spook.

Who is this Holy Spirit? It’s another way of explaining, giving us another glimpse of who God is. God is Spirit. I’m talking to a roomful of spirits, who just happen to be inside of material bodies. That’s why, when you die, your body stops functioning but you don’t stop functioning. The life in you, which is the spirit, departs from the body and exists. It exists and departs to the realm of the spirits, with God being the Chief Spirit.

The gift of the Holy Spirit means that if you’ve been confronted by God and He’s changed you and you’ve turned toward Him, He will put His Spirit in you. He will come and live with you. I can’t explain how that happens. It’s not like somebody comes and possesses your body like some freak show you see on TV. It’s not demonic possession. He comes as a quiet house guest. He comes to occupy and influence, to give you guidance and direction, to empower and work within you so you can do the very things Jesus commanded.

Without the Holy Spirit, without God in you, there’s no way we could live the Christian life. The Christian life is humanly impossible. What does it mean to be a Christian? It is the life of God in the soul of a man. It’s supernatural natural. As you live your natural life, doing the things you’ve always done, as a Christian, you now have the supernatural power of God living in you. The supernatural has been added. God’s been added.

The Christian life is not an academic matter. It’s not about learning church doctrine. If you think that’s all the Christian life is, you’re not a Christian. You can go to Bible college and seminaries and get doctorates in theology and religion and still go to hell because filling yourself with knowledge is not God in you. It’s good that we fill the head with knowledge, we are to renew the mind with truth, but it’s so much more than that.

The Christian life is not a religious matter, it’s supernatural natural. It’s living this life with the power of God in you. That leads me to my last point.

IV. A Christian is Someone Who Has Something in Common With God’s People

I’m not here to get you to make a decision or manipulate your emotions so you will pray a prayer. I loathe that. My hope is in the Lord because without Him no one will be saved. But I want you to see I haven’t been given you my opinions but the Bible. My opinions have been shaped by the Bible but I want you most of all to see Scripture.

A Christian is someone who has something in common with God's people.

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42)

Then there's verses 44-47, where you see what they have in common. Once again, we heard this from the baptismal candidates. Things are different. Hannah told us things weren't the same anymore. Daniel told us one of the things that's changed with him was that he just wants to be with God's people. Which means Christianity requires separation from the world, even sometimes loved ones and friends still in the world who can't understand what has happened to you. You will find you have more in common with God's family than your own blood relatives. We don't make that happen, it's what naturally happens to a believer.

Not only do you want to be around other believers but you want to hear the word of God proclaimed, preached. Again, I'm amazed at how we're seeing that in just a few short months in this young man's life. I mean, I could not stand to listen to my sermons. Sometimes I have to because we put them on the web and I have to make sure the quality is there, but, man. When I walk through the office and hear my voice, I cringe. I'm going to really cringe after today because of the head cold. And for somebody to go from the beginning of 2016 and listen to all of that, there's a reason. He wants to be fed. He wants to know more. He wants to be strengthened. He wants to be encouraged. He wants to be helped.

If you're listening to this and you don't understand it, it could be because the God factor is not involved in your life. If God came into your life, like He's come into ours, you'd be saying the same thing and you wouldn't have to make yourself say it. That's the beautiful thing about Christianity. How do you become a Christian? Well, God makes you a Christian, and when He does, new things happen. “Old things are passed away and, behold, all things become new.”

You're a new creation. God has literally remade you. That's what we need. That's what you need. If you haven't had that happen to you, I'm praying for you right now that you will say yes to Christ. The exact thing Peter said to these 3000 people, I say to you: turn. Turn from your sin, run towards Christ, ask Him to invade and confront your life. Ask Him to show you how great He is and how wicked you are. Ask Him. You say, “He'll never listen to me.” That, my dear friend, is the enemy's lie to you.

See, there's another spirit at work here. He was made by God, he's called the Devil, and he rebelled against God. He manipulates and keeps you under his control so you continue in your rebellion against God. Break the lie. How do you break the lie? By believing the truth about God, who said, “All who will come to Me, I will receive and not cast out.” The Bible says if you will “confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). I believe that.

If you're saying, “I don't know who this man is or what he believes, but I know something's happened as he's been speaking. I know I've been confronted by my sins. I know if I stood before

God, I would have no excuse. I would stand before Him guilty and condemned.” Well then, right now, cry out for the mercy of God. I guarantee you He will forgive and pardon. He will give you the same Holy Spirit. For Peter said this promise was not just for them and their children but to as many as the Lord our God shall call.

That’s how one becomes a Christian. Amen.