

## **CHAPTER 20**

### **SUMMARY - HOW DO WE ACTUALLY BECOME A CHRISTIAN? – WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO IN PRACTICAL TERMS?**

#### **Preparatory steps to help you get ready to become a Christian:**

Before we look at exactly how to take the step of becoming a Christian, let's consider what to do if you don't quite feel ready yet. Perhaps you still feel there is some blockage or obstacle which prevents you making a decisive step to put your trust in Jesus. If so, don't rush it.

It is extremely important to start your Christian life with a clear and definite decision of your will. Your will is the part of you that God is most interested in. He wants you to hand it over to Him. To be able to make such a clear decision to become Jesus' disciple you need to be fully convinced that the gospel is true. If you don't yet feel completely ready to make such a definite decision, you can at least take these sensible preparatory steps. These will help you to get to the stage where you are ready:

#### **a) Prayer**

Begin by sincerely asking God for help. Even though you may not yet be a Christian, it is perfectly alright for you to pray to God and ask Him for His help. Ask for this in two specific ways:

- i. Ask Him to show you the real extent and seriousness of your own sin and to enable you to see your sin the way that He sees it and to feel what He feels about it.
- ii. Ask Him to help you to read the Bible and to understand it and for your eyes and your mind to be opened so that you can believe it. Nobody can understand the Bible just through their own intellect. It requires the help of the Holy Spirit or you will make no sense of it. However, when God opens your eyes, it will make sense.

#### **b) Begin to read the Bible every day**

Preferably read the Bible morning and evening, but at least once per day. If you are a non-Christian and are new to the Bible then begin in the New Testament with the gospels. Then follow on with Acts and then on through all the letters of the New Testament until you reach the book of Revelation at the end. If you lack faith, or real repentance, or if you just lack understanding, then reading your Bible on a daily basis like this will provide you with what you need. After you have finished the New Testament then go back and read the whole of the Old Testament. Then start on the whole New Testament

The Bible says faith comes by hearing (or reading). Therefore, if you have not yet got faith then reading the Bible is how you get it. Also, God will provide understanding to you if you really seek for Him diligently and seriously with your whole heart:

*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.  
Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)*

When you read the Bible it is also 'reading you'. It speaks to your heart, and convicts and changes you. You need to be realistic though about how long it will take for you to gain a good

overall understanding of the whole Bible. It won't happen overnight. So don't expect that, or you'll get discouraged and give up. Keep pressing on and read as much as you can and take note of all that you do understand. Those things that you don't yet grasp can be looked at again later.

**c) Honestly assess where you currently stand**

Maybe you already know that you are a sinner and sincerely want to repent. It may be that you already believe all those basic essentials that I have listed earlier in chapter 15. If so, then there is nothing to stop you from becoming a Christian right now.

If you still feel in doubt as to whether you are a sinner, or as to whether you genuinely believe in Jesus, then wait. Keep reading your Bible daily. Keep praying to God to help you to wholeheartedly repent and believe. Also ask him to help you to get past any obstacles or blockages which might be hindering you from becoming a Christian.

**If you feel you are ready to make a definite decision of your will to become a Christian, here are some practical steps to take:**

If you feel you are ready now to truly repent and believe in Jesus, and you are genuinely serious about it, then go ahead and become a Christian now. There is no set formula for how you go about this, but, from experience, it may be helpful to do it broadly along the following lines:

**Step one in becoming a Christian – repent towards God the Father**

**How to repent – what to do in practical terms:**

Get a pad of paper. Put the date at the top and write on it any specific sins, or transgressions or attitudes of rebellion, that you feel aware of in your life. Write down anything that you are doing now or in the past that you can remember. Make the list as long as it needs to be. Ask God to help you remember the things He is most concerned about. He will bring to mind specific sins or transgressions, past or present, that He particularly wants you to repent of. They will be sins that are especially significant in your own life.

God will not bring everything to mind, because it would need a computer to deal with all your sins. What He will do is bring the most important or most relevant ones to mind. To start with it may only be a few. The exact number of sins you write down does not matter so much. What matters is that you seriously repent of them and really mean it.

You do not have to write things down if you prefer not to. You could just speak them out. But, writing does help to make it more real. Plus it is easier, later on, to look at it and feel sure that you really did this and that you meant it. I would advise it.

For each of the sins write down the name of the person who may have been affected by it. It could be your wife, children, employer, work colleague, friend or relative etc. Then alongside that name write down what you might be able to do to put it right. Sometimes it will not be possible to put it right. Sometimes it will. It may be that the most you can do is give an apology.

Other times you may be able to repay and put right the damage that you have caused in some practical way. For example, if you have been stealing from your employer or fiddling expenses, then you need to deal with that. It could be very hazardous to go to your employer and openly confess. That could result in dismissal or even prosecution. It is not always necessary to go that far. You need to be

guided by your own conscience on that. There is a need to be practical and wise at the same time as being sincere.

If you have been stealing from your employer, then here is a good way to repay, without having to risk getting into serious trouble. You could set about working unpaid overtime for a sufficient period of time to more than pay back what you owe. Calculate on paper and work out how much extra time you need to work secretly without claiming any pay for it.

Then quietly set about doing that extra work without telling anybody. In calculating it, err on the generous side. Make sure you fully repay or even over pay. This is practical repentance. It demonstrates to God that you mean what you say and you are not just being casual or shallow. There may be other ways that you can do it.

Apologies will be needed for many people, especially those closest to you such as your wife, children, parents or close friends. Where it is appropriate, go and see each person and apologise specifically for things that are suitable to raise. Do it unreservedly. Do not qualify your apology or seek to explain or justify your actions. Just straightforwardly apologise. Ideally, tell the person that you have become a Christian and feel you need to repent of what you did or said which has wronged them.

**Be careful with this, however. Do not bring up painful things that are in the past and which would only cause even more pain and harm to others if they were to be openly raised again now.**

Some things need to be repented of privately, just between you and God. You need to ask for the wisdom to know the difference. If however an apology will help and will not cause harm to that person or to anybody else, then go and directly apologise face to face with the person.

They may receive it well, or they may not. But whatever their reaction is, your going to them will please God, and it will help you to properly repent. However, do not go to people to tell them things you have said or thought about them which they are not aware of. That would only cause pain and upset them for no beneficial purpose.

Once you have written out your list of sins and are resolved to deal with them, don't wait until you have spoken to the people on the list. You need to speak out your repentance towards God first. It's important that you tell God out loud that you repent. Again, there is no formula for this, but it is a good idea to kneel down. You can do it on your own, or even better with a mature Christian to help you, and to be a witness to it.

If you are doing this with a genuine and mature believer alongside you, don't be ashamed to speak out loud and don't imagine that they will disapprove of you. They won't. They will just want to help you to get it all out and dealt with. They will have had similar sins in their own past.

Speak your repentance out loud to God the Father directly. Kneeling helps because it puts your body into a humble position. There is a direct relationship between the position of your body and the attitude of your mind. Altering your posture can really help to alter your attitude of mind.

You do not have to use eloquent words or indeed any particular form of words. Just speak in your own way with your own vocabulary. Tell God that you are sorry for the things that you have done and that you recognise that you have sinned against Him and others. Then apologise to Him directly. But only say it if you mean it. If you don't yet mean it then persist with the preparatory steps I set out earlier, i.e. prayer and Bible reading, until you do really mean it.

Then ask God the Father for His forgiveness. Tell Him that you want to turn away from all your sins and that you want to renounce them and stop committing them. At the same time ask Him for His help in turning away from them, because on your own you cannot change or achieve anything.

Both you and God will know whether you are sincere in the prayer that you make. Therefore do not be phoney or try to kid God or yourself. Just be straight and come clean with God, without any pretentiousness.

## **Step two in becoming a Christian - believe in (or on) the Lord Jesus Christ**

*<sup>9</sup>That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. <sup>11</sup>As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." <sup>12</sup>For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, <sup>13</sup>for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." *Romans 10:9-13 (NIV)**

You need to be clear in your own mind that you believe the Bible and that you know and understand the main points that we need to believe in order to be a Christian. Please refer to the list of foundational things that you need to believe that was set out earlier in Chapter 15. I will reproduce the list here in short form, i.e. without the Bible verses in support.

Do remember, however, that believing in Jesus is not just a mental attitude that happens only in our minds. If it is real then it will show itself in what we do, i.e. in our actions and words. It will bring about a changed lifestyle.

Please now consider this abbreviated list. Do you understand and believe all of these basic things?

### **THE BASIC ESSENTIALS THAT WE NEED TO BELIEVE:**

- a) That God exists, that He is the one true God and that there is no other God.
- b) That God exists in three separate Persons: God the Father, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit.
- c) That nonetheless, those three individual Persons together form One God. So, it is true to say that God is One.
- d) That God created everything, including us, and that we belong to Him.
- e) That we are unworthy and have sinned, transgressed and rebelled against God and offended and angered Him.
- f) That we are therefore condemned in God's eyes. And, unless we are forgiven, we will be eternally separated from Him when we die and face His judgment. We will then go to eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire because of our sin.
- g) That nothing we can do on our own behalf can save (justify) us by giving us forgiveness or righteousness in God's eyes. We are not good enough and none of our works or deeds will ever be good enough to save us, because in God's eyes even our best deeds are inadequate.

- h) That Jesus Christ is not only a man, but is also divine, (i.e. that He is God). He is the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God. He became a real human being, whilst at the same time remaining the Son of God.
- i) That Jesus Christ lived a sinless life and then died an unjust death, which He did not deserve, in order to be punished in our place and pay the penalty for our sins. That was how God the Father viewed Jesus' death. He was putting His own Son, Jesus, to death to be the sacrifice that pays for our sin.
- j) That when the Lord Jesus Christ was on the cross, the burden and the guilt of all the sin of the world was put upon Him. God the Father poured out His wrath, anger and punishment upon Him, instead of on us.
- k) That the Lord Jesus Christ died and then rose from the dead. He was resurrected physically and He ascended physically into Heaven 40 days later. He is now alive and in Heaven, in His resurrection body, waiting to return to the earth.
- l) That we must repent towards God the Father for our sins and sincerely turn away from our sins and genuinely change in our attitudes, behaviour and lifestyle.
- m) That we must be baptised in water, by full immersion, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And this must be done *by* us as a repentant believer, not done *to* us as an infant. Any past baptism as a baby does not count as real baptism.
- n) That we must receive the Holy Spirit, otherwise referred to as being "filled with" or "baptised in" the Holy Spirit.
- o) That forgiveness and eternal life with God are available to anyone who meets God's conditions. Those are to repent, believe, be baptised in water and receive the Holy Spirit.
- p) That there is no other way for any person to get to God. No man, religion, system, activity or formula can save us. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can do it because of His death on the cross, when he took our punishment in our place.
- q) That if we die we will eventually be physically resurrected. We will then have eternal and indestructible "resurrection bodies" which will never die. This is true both for believers and unbelievers. The resurrection body of an unbeliever will never be destroyed, even in the Lake of Fire
- r) That Jesus Christ will, one day, return physically and literally to this earth. He will then rule as King of Israel and King of the whole world. In other words, He will set up the Kingdom of God and bring it to completion.

Go through the above list and check carefully whether you truly understand and believe each point. If so, speak out loud to God to say to Him that you do believe each of those things. Tell Him that you do put your faith and trust solely and totally in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, not in yourself or in your own goodness.

Ask God to give you the forgiveness that is available due to Jesus' death on the cross, so that you can be saved and given eternal life. Ask for the guilt of your sins to be placed on Jesus Christ and for His righteousness to be transferred, or credited, to you. Just ask God in your own simple words and style, using your own vocabulary.

Speak to God the Father and tell Him that you want to follow His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as His disciple, (follower) from this moment on and for the rest of your life. Promise God, if you really mean it, that you will give yourself and everything you have to Jesus. Hand over your whole life, and all your ambitions, and plans, so that Jesus Christ will, from now on, be your Lord and the one who decides your priorities. That includes where you go, what you do, and how you live.

Speak out loud and tell God the Father and Jesus that you believe that Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords and that you acknowledge Him to be so. Say that you also personally recognise and accept Him as King and Lord in your own life. Then ask God to give you the grace and the help to be Jesus' disciple and to remain faithful to Him.

Remember that being a disciple, and continuing faithfully on "the Way", is not what justifies you or gives you forgiveness. However, it is what is needed to bring you to Christian maturity. More importantly, it is what Jesus commands us to do. The idea of handing over the whole of your self and your future to Jesus can be scary. You might fear that He cannot be trusted with your future and to make decisions about what you should be and do.

It's natural to be apprehensive about that, but you really don't need to be. He is totally trustworthy and can be relied on to form a plan for your life which is far better than anything you could plan for yourself. God is good and kind and full of mercy. All His plans for your life will be for your good:

***For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*** *Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)*

Having taken each of these steps, then thank God for forgiveness and salvation and for the gift of eternal life. However, do not rely on your feelings. It may be that your emotions will surface at this point. You may be tearful or emotionally moved in some way. Or, more likely, it may be that you are not. Becoming a Christian is primarily a decision of the *will*, not of the *emotions*. God is much more interested in what you *decide* than in what you *feel*.

Therefore do not judge the validity of what you are doing on the basis of whether there is an outward emotional reaction. The emotions are a side-issue here. They may or may not materialise. Instead, simply take God at His word. Claim the forgiveness that you have asked for and believe that you have received it. God is faithful. He can be trusted and relied upon to honour every promise that He makes. Therefore believe Him to do so. On that basis, then give thanks to Him for forgiveness, justification and eternal life.

### **Step three in becoming a Christian: be baptised in water, preferably in public.**

If necessary please refer again to Chapter 16 on baptism in water. This is a badly neglected topic. Many people have come to regard it as something peripheral and non-essential, as if it was an "optional add on". Others take the view that they were baptised as a baby and therefore it has already been done.

As explained in Chapter 16, that is not a biblical view. Baptism needs to be done when you have genuinely made a conscious decision to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. If all you have had is baptism as a baby then you need to do it again. Whatever was done to you as a baby is not valid baptism in water. At any rate, nobody was ever baptised that way in the Bible.

Therefore, once you have taken these steps, go as soon as you can and get baptised in water. Speak to someone at church, and get baptised in a river, or lake, or in the sea or a swimming pool. Anything will do. (However, if for health reasons you cannot do that, then be baptised in a warm bath at home. If you really can't do even that, I feel sure that God will accept you being baptised in some lesser way, eg by sprinkling some water on your head, provided that is all you can manage. God is very reasonable and gracious, but you would need to have a genuine reason to depart from the normal biblical method.)

Ideally, do it publicly so that others can witness it. That will help you to get over any problem you may have of being ashamed of being identified with Jesus Christ. The act of baptism in water will help to remove that. It will also let the world, and the Devil, know where you now stand. It will also help to cut you off from your past life as an unbeliever. That will help you to become free from many things such as habitual sins, addictions or demonic influences in your life.

Quite apart from any benefits it brings, we have been commanded to be baptised to demonstrate our repentance and our belief in Jesus. Therefore don't leave it out or neglect it. Don't even delay it. Baptism is very important.

### **Step four in becoming a Christian: receive the Holy Spirit**

Look again at Chapter 17 if you still feel any confusion or uncertainty about this. However, if you feel you do grasp what this means and you want to go ahead and receive the Holy Spirit, then, first of all, make sure you have taken the first three steps properly. Make sure you have genuinely repented, that you really do believe, and that you have been properly baptised in water. If you haven't taken all of these steps properly, then put that right. Take them now.

If you have properly dealt with all three of these steps and you want to receive the Holy Spirit, then the ideal is to get the help of someone else who believes that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is for today, not just for the first century. Find someone who has, him or herself, received the Holy Spirit and spoken in tongues or operated in one or more of the other gifts of the Holy Spirit. Ask them to pray for you and lay their hands on you. It needs to be a genuine Christian who has a proper, biblical understanding of the need to be baptised in the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, most people in British churches, including leaders, do not have that level of knowledge or understanding. Therefore there is a problem. If you were to just ask the first person you see, they may tell you that you don't need to receive the Holy Spirit. Or they may say that you have already received the Holy Spirit automatically. They may even tell you that the gifts of the Holy Spirit have ceased and are not for today.

They may be sincere, but they would be wrong and they would confuse you. God is unlikely to use such a person to help you to receive the Holy Spirit. They will only hold you back and discourage you.

So, try to find a person who does understand and believe the Bible on this subject. They can help you. They can then simply lay their hands on you, i.e. on your head or back, and pray for you to receive the Holy Spirit. As they pray for you pray also for yourself, in your own language, for Jesus Christ to baptise you in the Holy Spirit.

Remember that Jesus Christ *wants* to do that. He's not against the idea. He is in favour of it. He is the very Person who baptises us in the Holy Spirit. You don't need to persuade Him. The main thing

is for you to believe that Jesus does want you to receive the Holy Spirit and to expect Him to answer your prayers in this regard.

Try to relax and avoid being stressed or afraid or tensed up if you can. Then be willing to step out and open your mouth to speak. Don't speak in English. Just begin to make sounds and see what comes. Step out boldly and with faith. Go ahead and don't hold back or be shy. Don't be afraid of sounding foolish. My fear of that held me back needlessly for two years. Don't make my mistake.

You may find that you suddenly take off and are away, speaking in a new unknown language immediately. Or, you may not. There could be a delay or blockage which holds you back. If so it could be for a number of reasons. Here are some of the main ones:

- a) You may be too tense/uptight/afraid. The Holy Spirit will not force Himself on you. He will wait for you to be ready and relaxed. He wants *you* to be in control of when to speak, not Him.
- b) You may not have genuinely or properly repented, believed or been baptised in water. If so, see chapters 10-17 again.
- c) The person helping you may not understand or believe any of this. Or he may never have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit himself. If so, try asking someone else (if possible). Or, just go ahead by yourself. You are much better off being alone than being prayed with by someone who doesn't agree with, or believe in, what you are seeking for. They would be tensed up themselves, or even opposing you.
- d) There could be some particularly significant sin in your life which God wants you to deal with first. I don't mean that you must deal with or cease all sin. That's not possible this side of death. However, there can sometimes be major sins which God is particularly concerned about. For example you could be involved in some sexual affair or stealing money or living in some immoral way. God may want you to stop that particular sin first before He will recognise you as having genuinely repented. Therefore consider this and ask God to reveal to you any specific sin that He is particularly concerned about, which may be a blockage to you receiving the Holy Spirit.
- e) There could be some occult involvement in your past, (or even now), which has still not been dealt with or repented of fully. If so, repent now, fully and unreservedly. If you still possess any occult books or charms or jewellery etc, burn all it now. Ask God to set you free from its hold over you. If you are unsure, ask God to highlight anything relevant.

If you have nobody at all who is suitable and willing to pray with you, do not be discouraged. Go ahead by yourself. Just take all the same steps but pray by yourself. Remember, it is Jesus Christ Himself who baptises us in the Holy Spirit, not the person who prays with us or lays their hands on us. Such a person, if there even is one, is just there to help us and to explain things. They are not essential.

Also, be aware that some people just seem to take longer than others to break through. That ought not to be the case, but it often is. If so, and there is delay, keep on asking and don't give up. Also keep on attempting to speak. Don't just leave it to God alone. Play your part by stepping out in faith and beginning to speak. Let your mouth make sounds and see if God then releases you fully to speak in tongues. If you persist, then He will do so at some point, even if not immediately.

## **After you have become a Christian – what next?**

### **Tell others**

If you have not had a person to be with you and help while you take these steps, and to be a witness, then, instead, go out now and tell others what you have done. It is important that you start as early as possible to let other people know that you have become a believer and have begun your journey along "the Way". This will "help the concrete to set" and become permanent. The more publicly and openly you acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ, the quicker you will lose any fear or embarrassment at being associated with Him. Also the bolder you will become in being able to tell other people about Him.

If you keep quiet about your conversion at the start you will find that that silence will turn into a habit and become a major handicap later on. It will hinder your growth and development. Therefore quickly tell at least one person, preferably a mature Christian, what you have done. Then tell others too, even those close to you, (unless it would put you in physical danger). Don't be worried about not knowing how to explain yourself or how to answer their questions.

The object is not to impress people, but to please God. He will be very proud that you are openly associating yourself with Him and learning not to be ashamed of Him. He will also reward you for it. I am not saying you have to tell everybody. Sometimes it could be unwise to tell certain people. But do at least make sure you tell some people, unless you are in a country where that would be dangerous due to persecution.

### **Join a biblical church**

Then seek to join a good and biblical church. Sadly, today in the Western world, this is not simple. Genuine churches are very hard to find, whereas there are far too many that are liberal, shallow, insincere, compromised and worldly. I give more advice in my book "Biblical Church" on how to find a sincere and genuine biblical church. Once you have found one, then join it. (See Book Eight in this series for more guidance).

You may need to drive quite a few miles. Become active in it and seek to learn as much as you can and to gain as much fellowship (i.e. making relationships) as you can with other more mature believers. You need their help, advice and friendship.

But even after you have joined a genuine church you must continue to be vigilant. You are under a duty to be discerning and careful to make sure that what you are being taught is biblical and accurate. That always remains *your own personal responsibility*. You can't delegate it to anybody, not even to church leaders. You must always be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11. Search the Scriptures daily to test whatever is being taught and to see whether it is true. Much of what is taught in British and American churches today is not true. The same applies to most of the Western world.

### **Set about seeking to become an effective disciple**

See chapter 23 in this book and also subsequent books in this series, for more detail on this. The key point in becoming an effective disciple is to *want* to be one. You could never become a pianist or a sculptor or dentist without first wanting to be one. Otherwise you would never pay the price or make the effort or do the necessary things to change from what you are now into whatever it is you want to be.

It is just the same with becoming a real disciple. It won't happen automatically. You will become a disciple to the precise extent that you want to. Therefore choose to be a 100% committed disciple. Then actively set out to obey all that God commands us to do in order to become one.