

INTRODUCTION

*"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge....."
Hosea 4:6(a) (RSV)*

The Bible says that what it has to say about Jesus is good news. The Greek word for that is 'gospel'. I have written this book about the gospel because I couldn't find a book that I could comfortably give to a non-Christian, or to a new or inexperienced Christian, which would tell them what Christianity really is. There are countless books about specific aspects of Christianity. However, there are very few which tell you frankly what Christianity actually is, or how to become a real Christian. I searched for such a book for years but couldn't find exactly what I wanted. The nearest thing I can find are books written in the nineteenth century or earlier. But they are too old fashioned in their language. Most are out of print anyway.

Most books written since World War Two give only an incomplete account of what the Christian gospel really is. They leave out or under emphasise many essential parts of the message, such as sin, judgment, Hell, the Lake of Fire, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth and the Kingdom of God. Most also give little or no emphasis to repentance. The gospel they usually present has been watered down and reduced to something along the lines of: "*God loves you and wants you to love Him*".

That is very true, but it isn't the gospel. It is only a fragment of it. There is far more that you need to know, believe and do if you want to become a real Christian. I want in this book to give you all the basics, without leaving anything out merely because it is controversial or worrying. If the Bible is true, then we need to be worried, until and unless we meet God's conditions. Those are that we must repent and believe and find salvation and eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The aim of this book is to show you how to do that. This book is aimed at a wide audience. I have tried hard to make it simple enough to be understood by complete beginners who know little or nothing about Christianity. But it is mainly aimed at people who have some church background. It is also intended for those who are already real Christians, but know they need to understand the gospel more clearly and thoroughly, not least in order to be able to explain it to others.

That is frequently necessary because in so many churches the basics are not properly taught. A person can easily be an otherwise mature Christian and know many things, but have only a flimsy grasp of the gospel itself. It is rather like someone who is doing 'A' level maths but has never been shown how to do long division. So, this book is also aimed at mature Christians.

I have been asked why I have chosen the somewhat controversial title, '*Real Christianity*', for this series of books and for my website. It is to distinguish the authentic message of the Bible from the many unbiblical alternatives. Those inadequate or false gospels are liberal, sceptical, mystical, ecumenical or incomplete. Most have added in elements from false religions or man-made ideas, traditions and philosophies.

In short, I want to focus on what the Bible actually says, as opposed to what men say, or even what churches say. I also want to present the 'ingredients' of Christianity in the right proportions and with the right amount of emphasis, giving greater focus to the things that Jesus emphasised and less attention to those which He did not. Every false religious belief system tends to do the opposite. In this regard it is worth quoting the distinguished Bible teacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones who said:

"We have somehow got hold of the idea that error is only that which is outrageously wrong; and we do not seem to understand that the most dangerous person of all is the one who does not emphasise the right things".

So in this first book, and in the following books in this series, I aim to cover as much as I can of what the Bible has to say and to be as balanced as possible in doing so. One day I hope to rewrite Book One in three or more versions so that it can be made shorter and simpler, and aimed more precisely at each of the above levels of person. Until then I would ask you to be patient if you feel at any particular point that I am being too detailed or too complex. Press on and read the whole of Book One. Then you will find out why the message of Jesus Christ is called "*the good news*" and how you can be saved by responding to it. That is my hope.

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