

BECOMING CHRISTIAN



FROM TO BE A CHRISTIAN

EDITED BY J. I. PACKER

THE GOSPEL

God created the world and made us to be in loving relationship with him. Though created good, human nature became fatally flawed, and we are now all out of step with God. In Bible language, we are sinners, guilty before God and separated from him.

The good news of the Gospel is that God took loving action in Jesus Christ to save us from this dire situation. The key facts of this divine remedy are these: God the Father sent his eternal Son into this world to reconcile us to himself, to free us to love and serve him, and to prepare us to share his glory in the life to come. Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit, lived a perfect life, died for our sins, and rose bodily from the dead to restore us to God. Given authority by his Father, Jesus now rules in heaven as King over all things, advancing God's kingdom throughout the world. In the fullness of time, Jesus will return to establish his kingdom in its glory on earth, and all things will be renewed.

Reigning in heaven over all things, Jesus Christ continues to draw sinners to himself. He enables us by his Holy Spirit to turn wholeheartedly from our sinful and self-centered ways (repentance), and to entrust ourselves to him to live in union and communion with him (faith). In spiritual terms, sin is the way of death, and fellowship with Christ is the way of life.

TURNING TO CHRIST

Turning to Christ brings us into fellowship with God. Baptism, which is the rite of entry into the Church's fellowship, marks the beginning of this new life in Christ. The apostle Peter, proclaiming the Gospel, said, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Through faith, repentance, and Baptism we are spiritually united to Jesus and become children of God the Father. Jesus said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). As we come to the Father through Jesus Christ, God the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts to know him, and we are born again spiritually to new life. To continue to live faithfully as Christians, we must rely upon the power and gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to God's people.

When the disciple Thomas encountered the risen Jesus, he acknowledged him by saying, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). To be a Christian you must, like Thomas, wholeheartedly submit to the living Christ as your Lord and God. Knowing the Lord Jesus means personally believing in him, surrendering your life to him through repentance and Baptism, and living as one of his joyful followers.

A clear way to make this commitment of faith and repentance is to offer to God a prayer in which you

- confess your sins to God, being as specific as possible, and repent by turning from them;
- thank God for his mercy and forgiveness given to you in Jesus Christ;
- promise to follow and obey Jesus as your Lord;
- ask the Holy Spirit to help you be faithful to Jesus as you grow into spiritual maturity.

One example of such a prayer is the following:

- Almighty Father, I confess that I have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions (especially _____). I am truly sorry and humbly repent. Thank you for forgiving my sins through the death of your Son, Jesus. I turn to you and give you my life. Fill and strengthen me with your Holy Spirit to love you, to follow Jesus as my Lord in the fellowship of his Church, and to become more like him each day. Amen.

NEXT STEPS

To be a Christian is to be included in God's family, the Church. No one should try to be a Christian alone. If you are making this commitment for the first time—or have not been a practicing Christian for some time—here are some further steps to take:

- Share your commitment as soon as possible with one or more Christians and with an ordained minister, so they can pray for you.
- If you are not connected with a church, join a biblically faithful one. If you are connected but not involved, look for ways to deepen your participation.
- If you are now becoming a follower of Jesus Christ and have never been baptized, it is important that you speak with a minister about preparing for Baptism. It is also important to pray for God's help and spiritual protection.
- If you are a baptized Christian but have not been living out your faith, it is appropriate for you to confess your sins and reaffirm your faith in the presence of a minister.
- In order to grow in your new life in Christ, it is vitally important that you be involved in regular worship, Bible study, prayer, and Christian fellowship.

Coming to personal faith in Christ is a momentous decision that is often not made quickly. If you are not yet ready to take this step, but you continue to seek after God, you may want to pray a prayer like the following:

- God, please reveal yourself to me. Draw near to me as I seek you. Open my eyes to see your truth. Show me those things in my mind and heart that keep me from faith in you. Help me to know and trust Jesus Christ. And lead me to those people who can help me as I seek to know you.

God will always answer such prayers made with patience, persistence, and humility. As you explore this catechism, continue to pray that you will come to know God more fully.

In order to provide clarity and further detail, and for the purposes of teaching and learning, these things will now be set out in question and answer form.

J. I. Packer and Joel Scandrett, eds., *To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 20–23.

A CATECHISM ABOUT SALVATION

1. What is the human condition? Though created good and made for fellowship with our Creator, humanity has been cut off from God by self-centered rebellion against him, leading to lawless living, guilt, shame, death, and the fear of judgment. This is the state of sin. (*Genesis 3:1–13; Psalm 14:1–3; Matthew 15:10–20; Romans 1:18–23; 3:9–23*)

2. What is the Gospel? The Gospel is the good news that God loves the world and offers salvation from sin through his Son, Jesus Christ. (*Psalm 103:1–13; Isaiah 53:4–5; John 3:16–17; 1 Corinthians 15:1–5*)

3. How does sin affect you? Sin alienates me from God, my neighbor, God’s good creation, and myself. Apart from Christ, I am hopeless, guilty, lost, helpless, and walking in the way of death. (*Genesis 3:14–19; Psalm 38; Isaiah 53:6; 59:1–2; Romans 6:20–23*)

4. What is the way of death? The way of death is a life without God’s love and Holy Spirit, a life controlled by things that cannot bring me eternal joy, leading only to darkness, misery, and eternal condemnation. (*Genesis 2:16–17; Deuteronomy 28:15–19; Proverbs 14:12; John 8:34; Romans 1:24–25*)

5. Can you save yourself from the way of sin and death? No. I have no power to save myself, for sin has corrupted my conscience, confused my mind, and

captured my will. Only God can save me. (*Psalm 33:13—19; Isaiah 43:8—13; John 3:1—8; Ephesians 2:1—9*)

6. How does God save you? God forgives my sins and reconciles me to himself through his Son, Jesus Christ, whom he has given to the world as an undeserved gift of love. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (*John 3:16; see also Psalm 34; Zechariah 12:10—13:2; Romans 3:23—26*)

7. Why does God save you? Because he loves me, God saves me from sin and judgment, so that I may love and serve him for his glory. (*Psalm 98; Isaiah 42:5—9; John 3:17; Romans 5:8—10; 2 Corinthians 5:18—21; Ephesians 1:3—14*)

8. Who is Jesus Christ? Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the Savior of the world. Fully divine, he took on our human nature, died on the Cross for our sins, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and now rules as Lord and King over all creation. (*Numbers 21:4—9; Psalm 110; John 3:13—15; Philipians 2:5—11; Colossians 1:15—20*)

9. Is there any other way of salvation? No. The apostle Peter said of Jesus, “There is salvation in no one else” (*Acts 4:12*). Jesus is the only one who can save me and reconcile me to God. (*Psalm 2; Isaiah 42:1—4; John 14:5—6; 1 Timothy 2:5—6*)

10. How should you respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? As soon as I receive and believe the Gospel, I

should repent of my sins, put faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord, and prepare to be baptized. “Now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2; see also Psalm 32; Isaiah 55:6–7; Acts 2:37–39)

11. What does it mean for you to repent? To repent means that I have a change of heart, turning from sinfully serving myself to serving God as I follow Jesus Christ. I need God’s help to make this change. (Psalm 51:16–17; Isaiah 57:15–19; Acts 3:19–21; 1 John 2:1–2)

12. What does it mean for you to have faith? To have faith means that I believe the Gospel is the truth: that Jesus died for my sins, rose from the dead, and rules over my life. Therefore, I entrust myself to him as my Savior, and I obey him as my Lord. (Psalm 40:1–10; Proverbs 3:5–8; John 1:9–13; Romans 10:9–10; Hebrews 11:1, 6)

13. How can you repent and put your faith in Jesus Christ? With God’s help, I can acknowledge and turn from my sins, receive the gift of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, and embrace the new life he freely gives me. (Psalm 86:1–7; Joel 2:32; Acts 16:30–34; Romans 10:11–13; Hebrews 12:1–2)

14. What should you do as the sign of your repentance and faith? After receiving instruction in the faith, I should be baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, thus joining his Body, the Church. If I have already been baptized, I should confess my sins, seek the guidance of a minister, affirm the

promises made at my Baptism, and take my place as a member of the Church. (*Psalm 51:5–7; Ezekiel 36:25–27; Matthew 28:19–20; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Peter 3:18–22*)

15. What does God grant in your new life in Christ?

God grants me reconciliation with him (*2 Corinthians 5:17–19*), forgiveness of my sins (*Colossians 1:13–14*), union with him in Christ (*Romans 6:3–5*), adoption into his family (*Galatians 4:4–7*), citizenship in his kingdom (*Ephesians 2:19–21; Philippians 3:20*), new life in the Holy Spirit (*Titus 3:4–5*), and the promise of eternal life (*John 3:16; 1 John 5:12*).

16. What does God desire to accomplish in your life in Christ?

God desires to free me from captivity to sin and transform me into the image of Jesus Christ, by the power of his Holy Spirit. (*Exodus 33:18–23; 34:29–35; Psalm 27:4, 7–14; Matthew 17:1–9; Romans 6:5–11; 2 Corinthians 3:12–18*)

17. By what means will God transform you into the image of Jesus Christ?

The first Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (*Acts 2:42*). Following this pattern, I will be transformed within the life of the Church through reading Scripture and receiving the sacraments, through worship and prayer, and through fellowship with God’s people and loving witness to the world. (*Deuteronomy 6:1–9; 2 Chronicles 7:1–3; Psalm 1; Acts 2:42–47; Hebrews 10:23–25*)

A Prayer for God's Love

Almighty God, you so loved the world that you gave your only Son, that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life: Pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love by your Holy Spirit, that we may delight in the inheritance that is ours as your sons and daughters, and live to your praise and glory, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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