

My new life in Christ

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When two people meet for the first time, it is common for them to get to know each other by asking questions about family and work. I am a husband, father, grandparent, church member, and employee. Outside of my family, church, workplace, and community I am best known as a science writer. I have authored a couple middle-school science textbooks, including an Earth Science textbook for Christian students. I have written about science and Christian faith at GeoChristian.com for over fifteen years.

My identity—my sense of who I really am—is not found in any of these things. The most important thing about me is that I am a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ. I would like to tell you my story of how I came to faith in Christ.

Background

I was raised in a church-going family. Being in Sunday school in the church basement is one of my earliest childhood memories. My family was in church most Sundays and for the most part as a child and teenager I believed in the existence of God, the truthfulness of the Bible, and that Jesus was somehow the Son of God and savior.

I toyed briefly with the idea of atheism in about 8th or 9th grade—probably based on something I read or heard—but that did not last long. If someone had asked me as an 18-year-old graduating from high school how a person could be saved—how they could be right with God—I might have said something about faith or believing in Jesus, but I would have quickly tacked on the scales of justice. If my good works outweighed my bad, I would be acceptable to God, and if my bad works outweighed my good, I would be judged and condemned by God. I figured that I was a pretty good person so I would be acceptable to God at the final judgment, but I wasn't *quite* sure.

Good News

After graduating from high school, I went to a university out of state. I was a semi-religious young man: I had a Bible on my bookshelf and walked over a mile to church on many Sunday mornings. In one of my first conversations with my roommate he asked if I was a religious fanatic. I answered, "Oh no, I'm not a fanatic," which was correct. My Christianity was shallow, cultural, and somewhat intellectual. I certainly did not want to be perceived as a fanatic.

I had joined a fraternity on campus to make friends. There was a Christian brother in this fraternity, and he set up an evening talk by a campus Christian ministry leader in the fraternity house living room. The speaker spoke about current events and the book of Revelation, which led to a

presentation of the good news about Jesus. I'm sure I had heard much of this before, but things came together for me that night as never before.

1. God's Love

There were four parts to the presentation that night. The first was about God's love. I heard John 3:16, which I had heard many times and even could have quoted:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Up until then, I had a rather muddled understanding of this verse. One thing that became clear to me that night about John 3:16 was that salvation is the product of God's love, and not based on my performance.

Along with God's love was the idea that God has a purpose for our lives. Jesus said,

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."
(John 10:10)

Who doesn't want an abundant life? I knew enough about the Bible and church history—Christians being fed to lions, sent to gulags and such—to know that Jesus was not talking about giving us a life filled with stuff and positive experiences. Jesus came to give us a different kind of abundant life, and I wanted that no matter what it might involve.

2. Sin

What blocks us from having the life God has for us? The biblical answer is sin. Sin is rebellion against God, disobedience to his good commands. We are all sinful—I knew that—and this sin separates us from God. The Bible tells us that

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
(Romans 3:23)

It is kind of hard to argue with the idea that none of us lives the way we ought to. I didn't really understand, however, the seriousness of this. The Bible also says that

"The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23)

which is spiritual separation from God. Our sin has made a gulf between us and God that we cannot cross. Our sin actually makes us enemies of God.

3. Christ

Because of our sin we cannot save ourselves, but God has provided a way, and that is through his son Jesus Christ. Jesus is fully God, and fully human at the same time. He lived the perfect, sinless life that we could never live, and was executed on a cross to die the death that we deserve. According to the Bible, Jesus died *for us*, which means that he died in our place, taking upon himself the penalty we deserved.

“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

Jesus is not just one of many ways to God, but is the only way for sinful humans to be reconciled to God.

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

Jesus died on the cross, but then rose from the dead.

“Christ died for our sins... he was buried... he was raised on the third day.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

The resurrection of Jesus is not only a central teaching of Christianity, but the central event of all history.

4. Faith

Finally, I learned from the Bible that one must put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as one’s savior. Faith is not an intellectual assent to doctrinal facts, but trust in a person.

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12)

The verse from the Bible that brought everything together for me that night is from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Before that night I would have thrown my good works into the salvation equation; the scales of justice I referred to earlier. But now I understood that my sin made those scales tip completely on the “condemnation” side of justice. Jesus, however, lived a life completely on the “righteousness” side of the scale, and he did so for me. God does not grant salvation because people deserve it, but even though we

don’t deserve it and in fact deserve the opposite. When one puts their faith in Christ, God replaces our unrighteousness with the righteousness of Christ. Now John 3:16 finally made sense.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

That night in the fraternity house living room, I put my faith in Christ, and in him alone, for my salvation. This involved a turning from my old ways of life and thinking to a new master. This was not just a spiritual reform, but a spiritual rebirth (John 3:1-15).

Since Then

I left that meeting with a heart that was overflowing with joy. I remember walking back to my dormitory, jumping and praising God as I walked across a grassy area on campus.

This occurred over forty years ago but is still fresh in my mind. Knowing God through Jesus Christ is the most important thing that has ever happened to me—greater than meeting or marrying my wife (the second greatest blessing in my life), greater than having children and grandchildren, greater than getting a master’s degree or any accomplishment in the workplace, greater than being a published author.

I understood from the beginning that putting my faith in Christ was far more than a free ticket to heaven. Ephesians 2:8-9 is followed by Ephesians 2:10, which says,

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

A person cannot save themselves through good works, but once one is saved, good works should flow out of their life.

What About You?

What about you? Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29). This is the most important question you will ever be asked.

You have been introduced to Jesus. Being introduced is not the same as knowing someone. I urge you to turn from yourself and trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, beginning an eternal relationship with him.

Grace and Peace