

HOW CAN I KNOW JESUS CHRIST?

TO BEGIN: if we were capable in ourselves of being what God would have us to be, adequately moral and acceptable through our own moral ability and efforts, why would Jesus Christ have even come to earth -- much less have suffered and died on the cross? Unless a Savior is needed, His coming would have been unnecessary or merely some sort of nice gesture.

Yet, Jesus did come, and He did lay down His life, thus affirming that we were guilty in God's eyes of putting ourselves and created things above our Creator – and in living as we prefer and choose. We were in the greatest of need. What incredibly Good News . . . God grants forgiveness and new life to all those who repent and believe in Christ and His resurrection.

THIS is how God showed His love among us . . . He sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. THIS is love . . . not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. THE BIBLE, 1 John 4:9-10

A BIT MORE OF WHAT THE GOSPEL COMMUNICATES ABOUT THIS SAVING WORK OF JESUS.

Nearly everyone starts out knowing they are nowhere near morally perfect. But most of us originally bought into the idea that whatever the standard is, it is not perfection, and that we are likely good enough for God to accept us. We certainly did not consider ourselves disqualified.

Yet according to the Bible we do not deserve, cannot earn, and therefore should not assume that we are approved of God. What comes as a shock is that everyone actually deserves God's punishment. *For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God [and] the wages of sin is death.* (Romans 3:23, 6:23). It is only because of the Lord's great patience, what scripture calls His "long-suffering," that we have not *yet* come into judgment.

What is the problem? In one word, sin. In the 21st century many do not seem to view personal problems in terms of sin. For some, the word suggests fanaticism of some sort or a harsh religious intolerance. The current idea is that we have progressed beyond the antiquated, narrow-minded sin label. The problem with that approach is that we do not seem to have progressed at all. What the Bible terms sin is still very much present. Doing away with the word has not done away with what the word described.

It is how God, our Creator, explains our failure to love Him with *all* our heart, with *all* our mind, with *all* our soul and with *all* our strength – as demonstrated in what we prioritize in life over Him. We simply have not obeyed God adequately. The Lord also commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We have not done that one adequately either. This thing called sin got the better of us in our relationship with God and in our human relationships as well.² And this is true before we even get into the specifics regarding our failures!

Jesus once said that the healthy do not need a physician but the sick (Matthew 9:12). We must admit to God's diagnosis before recognizing our need for a Savior. But even if we do realize our problem, we may still be off the mark. Some people adopt the faulty strategy of attempting to earn their way

back into God's favor and even into heaven itself – by working harder, or by trying to obey Him better, etc. In other words, some get the idea that they should become their own savior. That is a problem!

God has sent only one Savior – Jesus Christ. He died on the cross in the place of those He saves to mercifully pay the penalty for sin and to purchase eternal life which He now provides as a free gift.³ It is God's grace that saves us – not ourselves – certainly not our attempts to earn back God's favor.⁴ *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved”* (Romans 10:9-10).

² *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Matthew 22:37-39) *Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all* (James 2:10).

³ *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and . . . He was buried, and . . . He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.* (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

⁴ *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

WHAT IS THE FOLLOW-UP TO BELIEVING IN JESUS? A Christian not only initially *believes* something about Christ but keeps growing in deliberately *living* for Jesus as well. Part of the evidence that the *believing* is genuine is that the *living* is happening. Focus and strength come from belonging to Jesus Christ and learning to depend upon Him. Accepting and adopting this humble posture does not quench but enhances motivation for God-honoring excellence in the rest of life.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Romans 8:31-32