

## Christianity

### The Christian Life

Reading: Ephesians 4:1-16

#### INTRODUCTION – Christianity

Good Morning/Evening, I'm Pastor /Father Geoff.

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Last week I said that we would start a series in the Book of Daniel today.

I am delaying that until next week.

The reason is that in various pastoral meetings and some general discussions over the past few months I have sensed that there is a fair bit of confusion and misunderstanding about what the Christian Life is, and how we actually live it.

I want to address these issues head-on today.

In recent times I have had the joy of chatting with people who are not Christians but who are genuinely trying to get to know what Christianity is about.

They are people with little or no knowledge the Bible, the ancient world in which it is played out, and the characters and stories in it.

I want you to consider for a moment how to answer the simple question: "What is Christianity?"

If you mention anyone in the Bible you have to first explain who they are – Moses, King David, Paul, even Jesus.

If you say Jesus is the son of God, you'd have to explain that he was not some spirit being drifting around in the air – he actually became a physical human being, born to a human mother.

But he is nothing like an ancient Greek or Roman half god – like Hercules the son of Zeus who had a human mother. (These stories exist in many cultures)

He's not a mythical being, he's a real historical human person.

Where do you start your explanation?

## 1. What is Christianity?

The best way to help people who have no Christian background understand, is to outline of the Bible story starting at creation:

- God made the cosmos and then he made us in his own image
- In a direct act of rebellion and rejection we chose to try to live without Him
- God did not abandon us in our sin, nor did he destroy everything and start again
- He decided to rescue us and the world by sending his Son to be our Saviour
- He chose a people (Israel) and prepared them for the Saviour's coming
- God became human by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary who bore a Son
- The son was called Jesus, which means "God saves."
- He lived on earth, performed many miracles, even raising people from the dead
- He taught about the Kingdom of God
- He offended the religious leaders who executed him by crucifixion
- His death was on our behalf and paid the price for our sins
- He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven
- He will come again to take us into his eternal kingdom to live with him forever
- Each human being must choose to believe this story and receive the salvation of God by faith in his Son (or not).

Obviously, in such a summary of the story much is left out, but bits can be filled in as necessary.

I think most people who have been a Christian for a while could explain some approximation of the story.

That's the easy part.

Now the person says, "Ok, I want to be a Christian."

Most Christians know that in some way **they must give themselves to Jesus and receive him into their lives.**

So we ask the person to pray a prayer inviting Jesus into their lives.

There are some issues here, but I'll ignore them for now.

So far so good.

Here is where most Christians get a little stuck or end up in a place that maybe doesn't represent the Christian Life entirely accurately.

The person wants to know what they must do now that they are a Christian.

## 2. What Must I Do?

At first we want to assure them that **they are saved by faith not by works**, so there is nothing they really need to do – Jesus has done it all for them.

But we also know that there is something wrong with this answer because **there are some things they need to know** and there are right and wrong ways to behave.

Remember you're speaking to someone who knows nothing of Biblical morality (like the ten commandments – they've never heard of them), they don't know how to pray, they don't know who Jesus really is, or anything about what he taught.

So we **tell them to read the Bible.**

But there is an issue: they don't really understand what it says.

We **tell them to pray.**

But they don't know how, and what must they pray about?

So we **say, "you must come to church."**

"In fact, you should also **be in a Bible study or some kind of small group** to help you along."

"Oh, and you need to **tell others about Jesus and serve your neighbour**, so you should get some training and be involved in some ministry."

“Also important, you should give financially to the work of the Lord.”

“Oh, and you should get baptized, but that’s something we’ll arrange.”

How are we doing?

Let’s review where we’ve come to:

- We’ve told the person to receive Jesus and they’ve done so.
- They must also:
  - Come to church on Sundays. (Ignoring the problems with that statement)
  - Join a small group, and possibly get some other training and teaching
  - Be in a ministry – maybe serve soup or bread to the poor, or help Sunday School
  - Tell others about Jesus – need some training there
  - Give 10% or whatever amount of their money to the church
  - Try to be a nice person so don’t get drunk or sleep around

Is that a good summary of the Christian Life?

Is this what they must do?

What other stuff would you tell them to do now that they’ve become Christian?

What more is there in your Christian Life?

I want to tell you this is a very poor, a very, very bad summary of the Christian Life.

And the tragedy is, that for too many Christians this is what it has come down to.

There is some joy in all this at times, but there is also a lot of gritting of teeth and enduring it because we want to get to heaven one day.

We sweat through things that are tiring and boring and draining because our eyes are on eternity.

We justify it, because there is certainly an element of that, and verses like Hebrews 12:1-2 seem to say so:

Hebrews 12:1–2 (ESV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Persevering and enduring are a part of the Christian Life, but even here there is the word “joy.”

### 3. What is the Christian Life?

Now that I’ve raised it, those who have been Christians for a while will know that there are promises about joy and peace and the love of God.

Jesus said to his disciples:

John 14:27 (ESV) **Peace** I leave with you; my **peace** I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

We are promised the fruit of the Holy Spirit:

Galatians 5:22–23 (ESV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

In Romans we are told that God’s love is poured into us:

Romans 5:5 (ESV) and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

There is this side to living the Christian Life – by his Holy Spirit, God gives us joy and peace and fills us with his love.

We experience it from time to time, sometimes unexpectedly, but for too few Christians this is a fleeting and occasional experience.

What we summarized earlier is more often the daily reality.

I was asked recently by a very new Christian who is eager to learn and grow, whether they needed to be involved in everything we do at the church.

What must they prioritize? What must they do?

It is a question each of you must consider too.

What must you do, and why?

This is where the answer matters so much.

The things we mentioned in our summary of the Christian Life are not wrong in themselves, what is wrong is that they become ends in themselves.

In most cases our answer to the question “why?” is “because God says so.”

The reason some people get it confused is because they define salvation as “getting into heaven when I die.”

That is a true thing – Christians do get into heaven when they die – but there is a greater purpose in salvation.

The purpose of our salvation is to have an intimate relationship with God.

When we get to heaven (and the theologians amongst us will bear with me in the use of such colloquial language), we are promised:

1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

One day we will be in direct relationship with God, face-to-face.

It will be a blissful existence of experiencing the love of a being so beautiful and marvellous and majestic that we will be awe and wonder for all eternity.

Then there is now.

The Christian Life begins now.

The experience of the wonder of the love of God begins in the present world.

I want to come back to the question “What must I do now?” by talking about living it.

## LIVING IT –

The person we're talking to becomes a Christian.

This is what you tell him (or her) next.

The Christian Life is about walking with God every day.

It is about seeing what He is doing and being part of it.

It is about being attentive to the Holy Spirit and experiencing his love and peace in the midst of all that life throws at you, and knowing his direction and empowering.

It is being able to

- bring your fears about an exam
- recover from the disappointments and hurts that come your way
- being involved in what God is doing in other people's lives – speaking his word to them, or being his hands to serve them (a meal, a gift, a walk, a visit, ... whatever it may be)
- It is exciting, it is challenging, sometimes it's a bit scary, but the relationship we experience with God through the Holy Spirit makes it doable and bearable.

Now, to learn to live like this, to be able to hear his voice, and to be available to Him in everyday life requires training and practice.

That is where the church and the things we do come into play.

They are not ends in themselves, they are essential tools and aids to go from the life we were living without God to one where, as we read:

Ephesians 4:15–16 (ESV)      Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

- We grow up into Christ

- And we are part of a loving body where everyone does the things God gives them to do.

Learning this, being part of this – growing yourself and helping others grow – is the Christian Life.

But there is a struggle, there is something we have to do – in the power of the Holy Spirit we have to overcome our own personal desires and ambitions.

A little later in Ephesians Paul, the apostle and writer of the letter, says it like this:

Ephesians 4:22–24 (ESV) to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,<sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,<sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Through history, Christians have developed practices to train their souls in this new life.

Some practices train us how to overcome our deceitful desires, others train. Us how to live for God – i.e. overcoming the bad and cultivating the good.

Everything you choose to do, even the most mundane chores, or the most unpleasant tasks, can be, and should be, guided by the Holy Spirit and done in his power.

As you grow, God's purpose for you also becomes helping others know Jesus and grow in this new life of relationship with God.

Next week, as we begin the book of Daniel, it will make much more sense if you have this clear in your minds.

### A prayer of St. Augustine

*Lord Jesus, let me know myself and know You, And desire nothing except only You.  
Let me hate myself and love You.  
Let me do everything for the sake of You.*



*Let me humble myself and exalt You.*

*Let me think nothing except You.*

*Let me die to myself and live in You.*

*Let me accept whatever happens as from You.*

*Let me banish self and follow You, and ever desire to follow You.*

*Let me fly from myself and take refuge in You,*

*that I may deserve to be defended by You.*

*Let me fear for myself, let me fear You, and let me be among those who are chosen by You.*

*Let me distrust myself and put my trust in You.*

*Let me be willing to obey for the sake of You.*

*Let me cling to nothing except only to You, and let me be poor because of You.*

*Look upon me, that I may love You.*

*Call me that I may see You, And forever enjoy You. AMEN.*