

## What Is A Christian?

Everyone enjoys receiving a gift. Receiving an unexpected gift reminds us that we are loved. By its definition, a gift cannot be earned. If it is earned it is not a gift, but rather, payment for performance. A gift represents unearned blessing!

If you received an unexpected gift what would surprise you the most—the value of the gift itself or, the one giving the gift? Would it surprise you even more if you found out that God wants to give you a priceless gift?

If you are like most people, you have not ruled out the chance that there is a God in heaven. And like most people, you believe that if this God exists, he will reward you for being a “good” person. Basically, you believe that your “good” behavior outweighs your “bad” behavior; therefore, God will let you into heaven.

On the other hand, you may be like some people who believe that God is angry with them for not being a “good” person. You believe that, if there is a God, he will punish you based on some unforgivable behavior on your part. You may think that no good and holy God would have anything to do with a person like you!

But would it surprise you to know that God does not give you his priceless gift based on your behavior? If he did, it would not be a gift. It would be granted as payment for “good” performance, or withheld as punishment for “bad” performance. So then, to whom does God give his priceless gift? Read on to find out!

**Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-**

**John 1:12 NIV**

You must receive “him” if you are going to receive the gift. The “him” is Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ is the priceless gift that God wants to give you. In fact, God has already given Jesus Christ, you simply have to receive him and you will become God’s child. Receiving the gift that is Jesus Christ determines your eternal destiny, not your “good” or “bad” behavior.

You may be wondering why God would give you Jesus Christ in the first place? God gave you the gift of Jesus Christ for two reasons.

**For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.**

**Romans 3:23 NLT**

The first reason God gave you the gift of Jesus Christ is because you need him. Romans 3:23 tells you that everyone has broken God’s perfect standard for behavior and attitude. The Bible calls this sin. A sin is simply disobedience to God’s perfect standard for your behavior and attitude. And because everyone has fallen short of the standard (including you), everyone has a need that only Jesus Christ can meet.

You may be wondering, “What’s the big deal about a little sin or two?” To find out read Romans 6:23.

**For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**Romans 6:23 NLT**

Wages are something you earn for performance. At work you earn a wage because you perform certain tasks. This verse tells you that people also earn wages for the sin they commit. In this case, sin “earns” a wage of punishment because the actions are disobedient toward God. And since God is holy and just (pure in His character and fair in His actions), He must punish disobedience. The punishment is death, not just physical death, but spiritual death. To be spiritually dead is to be separated from God in this life and the next.

So far, the news has been bad, but this verse goes on to tell the rest of the story. Not only is God holy and just but also, He is loving. You see, in spite of your sin, God offers you the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus. It is a gift, not something you earn, but something that is given to you because God loves you.

You may be wondering, “If that is the case, is God just going to look past my sin—just blow it off?” Find the answer by reading Romans 5:8.

**But God has shown us how much he loves us — it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us!**

**Romans 5:8 TEV**

God is holy and just and cannot just “blow off” your sin. God’s justice demands that your sin be punished. But, because God is loving, he made a way for your sin to be punished on your behalf. Jesus Christ, God’s own Son, took your punishment in your place! He died for you even while you are still in your own sin!

Now, can you see how God can be holy, just and loving at the same time? He did for you, what you could never do for yourself. He made a way for you to be spiritually alive! The Bible says that you are dead in your sin (Ephesians 2:1-5), but you can be made alive through the death of Jesus Christ!

You may be asking yourself, “Why would God do this for me?” The answer to that question is the second reason God gave you the gift of Jesus Christ. To find the answer read John 3:16.

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

**John 3:16 NIV**

The second reason God gave you the gift of Jesus Christ is because He loves you! He does not want to be separated from you in this life or the next! He wants to have genuine intimacy with you in this life and the next. He does not want you to perish, so He made a way for you to have eternal life—Jesus Christ!

By now, you may be asking yourself, “How do I receive this gift?” To find out read Romans 10:9-10.

**For if you tell others with your own mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord and believe in your own heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in his heart that a man becomes right with God; and with his mouth he tells others of his faith, confirming his salvation.**

**Romans 10:9-10 TLB**

Receiving this gift from God is a matter of faith. Biblical faith is not blind, but rather, takes God at his word. When God says something, you can count on its truthfulness. In these verses, God says that if you confess (agree with) that “Jesus is Lord” and believe (trust) that “God raised him from the dead” you will be saved! Saved from the penalty of your sin!

When you confess and believe, you are agreeing with God that you have sinned against him and that Jesus died in your place for that sin! By confessing and believing, you are taking God at his word and thus receiving his gift of salvation through Jesus Christ! Now read Romans 10:13.

## **Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.**

**Romans 10:13 TLB**

The actual act of receiving the gift is done by “calling” on the name of the Lord. This is commonly known as prayer. Notice that this verse says “all” whom call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. In other words, you do not have to change first, know more, start going to church, or do anything else! You simply have to ask! God accepts you as you are!

You might pray a prayer something like this when calling on the name of the Lord: “God, I confess that I have sinned against you. I am sorry for that sin. I ask you to forgive me. By faith, I confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe that you raised him from the dead. I know that I cannot save myself so, please come into my life and save me from the penalty of my sin. Thank you for sending Jesus to die in my place and for giving me the gift of eternal salvation.”

If you have prayed your prayer with sincerity and faith, the Bible says that the angels in heaven are celebrating your salvation right now (Luke 15:10)! Record your decision on the next page as a spiritual milestone.

**My Response To God** (print this PDF document and fill in the blanks below):

By faith, I confess with my mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in my heart that God raised him from the dead so that I will not have to suffer the penalty of my sin.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, do this day, \_\_\_\_\_, take God at his word by turning from my sin and receiving Jesus Christ, God’s gift, as my Lord and Savior. Having called upon the name of Jesus Christ to save me, I now desire to fully unwrap God’s gift to me.

Now that you have unwrapped God’s gift, you may be asking, “What do I do now?” Read Luke 9:23 to discover the new life that comes with God’s gift!

## **Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross daily, and follow me.**

**Luke 9:23 NLT**

Once you receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you become his disciple. A disciple is one who seeks to become like his/her leader by imitating his/her leader and following his/her leader’s teachings.

This verse tells you the three daily commitments of a disciple—self-denial, cross bearing, and following Jesus. Self-denial is putting Jesus ahead of yourself. That is what it means to accept “Jesus as Lord”! Cross bearing is taking up Jesus’ purpose for your life as opposed to self-imposed goals. Following is “doing” what Jesus does on a daily basis. The Bible says that it is God’s will that you become more like Jesus everyday (Romans 8:29). The Bible also says, that as Jesus’ disciple, you will seek to live for him (Jesus) who died for you and no longer for yourself (2 Corinthians 5:15).

If you have truly received Jesus Christ, you will demonstrate your authentic faith by your behavior and attitude. Though God does not give you his gift based on your behavior and attitude, he does change your behavior and attitude once you receive his gift. God accepts you as you are, but does not leave you that way. Because he loves you, he also seeks to make you holy (pure) just as he is holy (1 Peter 1:13-16)! This is the abundant life that Jesus promised you (John 10:10)! If you are going to follow Jesus daily, you must do as he does.

To find out more about what Jesus does read Matthew 10:32-33.

**"If anyone declares publicly that he belongs to me, I will do the same for him before my Father in heaven. But if anyone rejects me publicly, I will reject him before my Father in heaven.**

**Matthew 10:32-33 TEV**

These verses tell you that if you are going to follow Jesus, you must acknowledge him before people. If you do, he will acknowledge you before his Father. This is the natural result of receiving the gift of Jesus Christ. As a true disciple, you will want to tell others about Jesus and what he did for you!

When Jesus acknowledges you to the Father, he is telling God that you are forgiven and acceptable in his eyes because you have accepted his death on the cross for your sin. When you acknowledge Jesus before people you are telling those people that you have accepted his death on the cross and received him as Lord and Savior! The ultimate way to acknowledge Jesus before people is through the act of baptism. To learn more about baptism read Acts 2:38.

**Peter said to them, "Each one of you must turn away from his sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit.**

**Acts 2:38 TEV**

After Jesus had resurrected from the dead and returned to heaven, one of Jesus' disciples named Peter preached a powerful sermon about Jesus in the city of Jerusalem. The audience was convinced of its truth and asked, "What shall we do?" Peter's reply was to instruct them to repent (turn from their sin) and be baptized (immersed in water) in the name of Jesus Christ.

Since you have turned from your sin (repented) and received Jesus, you must be baptized! It is the first way that you follow Jesus and acknowledge him before people. Baptism is an act of obedience that symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:4). By being baptized, you are publicly identifying yourself with Jesus Christ, thus acknowledging him before people.

To find another way to follow Jesus and acknowledge him before people read Matthew 28:19-20.

**Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

**Matthew 28:18-20 NLT**

Just after Jesus resurrected from the dead, but just before he returned to heaven, he instructed his disciples to make (more) disciples of all the nations. In other words, Jesus' disciples will acknowledge him before people by seeking to lead more people to become disciples.

Sharing Jesus with other people is a natural part of following Jesus on a daily basis. All true disciples seek to lead their family, friends and neighbors to Jesus. Now, will you not do the same for those around you?

These verses also speak about baptizing and teaching these disciples all that Jesus had taught them. That is the purpose of the Church. The Church seeks to make and mature disciples. A maturing disciple is involved in a local congregation of baptized believers that gathers together regularly for worship, training and encouragement to send out its members to tell others about Jesus. To learn more about the importance of being involved in a local church read Hebrews 10:19-25.

And so, dear brothers, now we may walk right into the very Holy of Holies, where God is, because of the blood of Jesus. This is the fresh, new, life-giving way that Christ has opened up for us by tearing the curtain-his human body-to let us into the holy presence of God.

And since this great High Priest of ours rules over God's household, let us go right in to God himself, with true hearts fully trusting him to receive us because we have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean and because our bodies have been washed with pure water.

Now we can look forward to the salvation God has promised us. There is no longer any room for doubt, and we can tell others that salvation is ours, for there is no question that he will do what he says.

In response to all he has done for us, let us outdo each other in being helpful and kind to each other and in doing good.

Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.

#### **Hebrews 10:19-25 TLB**

This passage speaks of some of the benefits you now have as a disciple of Jesus Christ. First (verses 19-22), you have direct access to God because Jesus has made you pure in God's sight. That means you can pray to God anytime, anywhere! When you make a mistake (commit a sin) you can quickly confess that sin to God and he will quickly forgive you (1 John 1:9)! The Bible tells you to simply ask God for what you need (Philippians 4:6-7).

Second (verses 23-25), you have many other believers around you to help you hold fast to your faith. Following Jesus on a daily basis is not a natural thing for you to do therefore you will need support and encouragement as you seek to remain faithful to your commitment to Jesus. A local church will help you understand the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17), learn how to pray, learn how to serve others and share your faith. Basically, a local church will become your "Faith Family"!

Ozark Highlands wants to be your "Faith Family"—we want to baptize, love and encourage you in your new commitment to Jesus Christ. Please send an email to [info@ohconline.org](mailto:info@ohconline.org) and simply put in the Subject Line: "I am a new Christian!" Someone will respond to your email and set up an appointment with you to discuss your "next step." After you have made contact with someone at Ozark Highlands Church start hiding God's word in your heart by reading through the Gospel a Mark in your Bible.

Now you have the answer to the original question, "What is a Christian?" A Christian is someone who has received the Gift of Jesus Christ!