

How To Be Sure You Really Are A Christian

(John 1:12 NKJV) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

(Romans 10:9-13 NKJV) that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. {10} For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. {11} For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." {12} For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. {13} For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

It is not uncommon for people who have just become Christians to doubt that they really are Christians. The emotions that felt so good on day one wear off and normal life seems to return. But something different has happened and your friends will notice it - often before you do. The two bible verses above give us reassurance when we start doubting that we really are Christians.

The first bible verse tells us that everyone who receives Jesus Christ into their life is given the right to become a child of God. The chief characteristic of children of God is faith they "believe in His name". This means that they trust Jesus and know that He is the way to God. Therefore if you have prayed and received Jesus Christ into your life then God has given you the right to become a child of God.

The second bible verse above tells us the two things that we need to believe if we are to truly be Christians. The first of these is that we must believe in our heart that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. In order to believe this we need to believe that Jesus Christ actually lived, died on a cross and then was raised from the dead by God. This is critical to our proper understanding of Christianity. If Jesus did not really exist then our sins are not paid for by anyone and we are still in danger from God's wrath. If Jesus lived but was just a good man and a teacher but did not die on the cross then we have the same problem plus another one. His teachings are so high that unless our sins are forgiven and we have confidence before God then it would be absolutely impossible to live the Christian life. If Jesus really did die on the cross but did not rise from the dead then we would have no way of knowing if He had truly conquered death. But when we believe the well attested historical fact that Jesus did rise from the dead then we affirm all the central truths of the Christian faith.

The second thing we have to believe and live by is that Jesus Christ is Lord. This is to say that Jesus is the Supreme Commander of the universe and is above every individual, government or human structure. This means that we must obey His orders, called commandments. The sign that we believe that Jesus Christ is Lord is if we are prepared to speak it out of our mouths before other people. This is the minimum amount of Christian obedience.

Do you believe in your heart that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead? Are you prepared to confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord? If so, the bible promises you in the book of Romans that you will be saved and that this applies to everyone who does these things. I suggest you go over these verses until you are sure in your heart that you have become a Christian.

How To Read The Bible

One of the first questions we ask is "how can I understand the bible"? The bible is a book that comes alive to Christians but lacks impact to those who don't believe. In today's devotion we will look at how to read the bible.

The best place to start is with the gospels, that is the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These books document the life of Jesus and help us to believe. They are at the beginning of the section called the New Testament. This is about three quarters of the way into your bible. Your bible should have a table of contents at the front so you can look up the various books of the bible. There are many translations of the bible available in English. In other languages there are often two or three translation available. If you look up the United Bible Societies home page on the Internet, they have many language translations available there. Try and get a bible that speaks to your heart in a language that you can understand and which is accurate to the original text. The bible was originally written in the Hebrew and Greek languages and has had to translated to all the languages of the world since. However it has always been very carefully translated and you can trust all the major bible translations.

When you read the bible take a pen and note book with you and write down the things you discover and the questions you have. Try and read about a chapter at a time and think it over carefully. Here are a few questions that will help you dig into the bible. What is this passage saying about God? What is this passage saying about Jesus? What is this passage saying about the Holy Spirit? Is there a command to obey? Is there a principal to learn? Is this saying something to my life right now? Is there a prayer I can pray? How can I apply it in my everyday life? Write the answers to these questions in your note book and you will soon build up a treasure house of scripture knowledge. It is important to pray as you read the bible. It doesn't have to be a long prayer, just something like "Dear God show me what this means and help me to obey".

It is good to read the bible in a quiet place relatively free from distraction. I read the bible in an armchair late at night when everyone else is asleep. Other people get up very early in the morning to read their bible and others find a quiet place at lunch time. There is no magic way to read the bible and it is not a magic book. You read it just like any other, using your mind and thinking hard and also allowing it to speak to your heart. As you keep reading you will find some things are said over and over again in the bible. These are the things that God wants us to pay most attention to. Commands like love one another, forgive those who have hurt you and do not judge people are in this category. These are the things you should major on. Do not get distracted into side issues or useless arguments. Read the bible to grow in Jesus Christ and to live better not to win arguments. (2 Timothy 2:14 NIV) Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.

There are some books to help you read to bible. The most common helps are concordances, bible dictionaries and commentaries. Any good Christian book store will have these. There are also some very good computer programs such as Quick Verse, Logos and the On Line Bible to help you study scripture. Why not go now and start reading about the birth of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1.

Bible Reading Plan

Bible Reading Plan - Its Importance

A Bible reading plan is critical to your development as a Christian. It may not always seem like it in this time-pressured world we live in, but spending time with God and reading His Word is the most important part of your day. If you want to know God's will for your life, the Bible is one of the primary ways God speaks to us. That's why the Bible is often called "God's Word" or "The Word of God." Because God created the world and everything in it, reading the Bible is the best way to learn about ourselves and the world around us. The Bible is our complete source of truth. There are numerous books written about the Bible, but none can take the place of the Bible itself.

New believers, as well as those who have been Christians for many years, cannot spend too much time reading the Bible. But for targeted growth, it's important to find a plan that works well for you. Once you've identified that plan, you need to be faithful to follow it.

Bible Reading Plan - God's Design for Communication

Having a Bible reading plan is important because God's Word is seed for your growth, as well as for your personal evaluation and discernment. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

God has always communicated through His people. Before the Bible was written, God instructed the children of Israel through the priests and prophets, who passed His Word on through each generation. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 says, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." This passage describes God's desire for His people throughout all time to make His Word a priority.

Bible Reading Plan - Getting Started

Each Bible reading plan is different. They are as varied as each individual, so you have many to choose from. Consider the following options, but remember to choose one. For the effective Christian disciple, regular reading in God's Word is not optional. It's a necessity!

- **The Chronological Plan:** Read the events of the Bible in the order they occurred. There are several Chronological Bibles available online and in Christian bookstores.
- **The Historical Plan:** Read the books of the Bible in the order in which they were written in the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek
- **The Old and New Testament Combined:** Read portions from both Testaments each day to see the continuing thread of Truth from Genesis to Revelation.
- **Variety Plan:** Read a portion each week from the Law, History, Psalms, Poetry, Prophecy, Gospels, and Epistles.
- **From Beginning to End:** Reading through the Bible from Genesis 1:1 straight through to the last page of Revelation. Stop and start as if you were reading a novel.

- **The Yearly Plan:** Many Bibles are available that are divided into 365 sections, allowing you to finish the Bible in one year. The 1,189 chapters in the Bible can be read in a year at a rate of 3 1/4 chapters per day.
- **The three-year-plan:** Study at a slower pace by using a plan.
- **Study the Life of Jesus:** Study by using a 30-day plan.
- **The Blended Plan:** Combine the Bible reading plans above to find the plan that works for you.

You will find a variety of Bible translations and languages available online, as well as study helps.

Bible Reading Plan – Implementation

Do you have a Bible reading plan? If this concept is new to you, then pick a Bible reading plan that looks interesting and jump in! You may want to experiment with several different plans. What matters most is that you're pursuing God through His Word every day! God will bless you and your daily time with Him will help you grow. God is an awesome God, and His Word is your life!

Joshua 1:8 says, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."

A Suggested 1-Year Bible Reading Plan

	The Law	History	Psalms	Poetry	Prophecy	Gospels	Epistles
Week	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
1	Gen 1-3	Josh 1-5	Ps 1-2	Job 1-2	Isa 1-6	Matt 1-2	Rom 1-2
2	Gen 4-7	Josh 6-10	Ps 3-5	Job 3-4	Isa 7-11	Matt 3-4	Rom 3-4
3	Gen 8-11	Josh 11-15	Ps 6-8	Job 5-6	Isa 12-17	Matt 5-7	Rom 5-6
4	Gen 12-15	Josh 16-20	Ps 9-11	Job 7-8	Isa 18-22	Matt 8-10	Rom 7-8
5	Gen 16-19	Josh 21-24	Ps 12-14	Job 9-10	Isa 23-28	Matt 11-13	Rom 9-10
6	Gen 20-23	Judg 1-6	Ps 15-17	Job 11-12	Isa 29-33	Matt 14-16	Rom 11-12
7	Gen 24-27	Judg 7-11	Ps 18-20	Job 13-14	Isa 34-39	Matt 17-19	Rom 13-14

8	Gen 28-31	Judg 12-16	Ps 21-23	Job 15-16	Isa 40-44	Matt 20-22	Rom 15-16
9	Gen 32-35	Judg 17-21	Ps 24-26	Job 17-18	Isa 45-50	Matt 23-25	I Cor 1-2
10	Gen 36-39	Ruth	Ps 27-29	Job 19-20	Isa 51-55	Matt 26-28	I Cor 3-4
11	Gen 40-43	I Sam 1-5	Ps 30-32	Job 21-22	Isa 56-61	Mark 1-2	I Cor 5-6
12	Gen 44-47	I Sam 6-10	Ps 33-35	Job 23-24	Isa 62-66	Mark 3-4	I Cor 7-8
13	Gen 48-50	I Sam 11-15	Ps 36-38	Job 25-26	Jer 1-6	Mark 5-6	I Cor 9-10
14	Ex 1-4	I Sam 16-20	Ps 39-41	Job 27-28	Jer 7-11	Mark 7-8	I Cor 11-12
15	Ex 5-8	I Sam 21-25	Ps 42-44	Job 29-30	Jer 12-16	Mark 9-10	I Cor 13-14
16	Ex 9-12	I Sam 26-31	Ps 45-47	Job 31-32	Jer 17-21	Mark 11-12	I Cor 15-16
17	Ex 13-16	II Sam 1-4	Ps 48-50	Job 33-34	Jer 22-26	Mark 13-14	II Cor 1-3
18	Ex 17-20	II Sam 5-9	Ps 51-53	Job 35-36	Jer 27-31	Mark 15-16	II Cor 4-5
19	Ex 21-24	II Sam 10-14	Ps 54-56	Job 37-38	Jer 32-36	Luke 1-2	II Cor 6-8
20	Ex 25-28	II Sam 15-19	Ps 57-59	Job 39-40	Jer 37-41	Luke 3-4	II Cor 9-10
21	Ex 29-32	II Sam 20-24	Ps 60-62	Job 41-42	Jer 42-46	Luke 5-6	II Cor 11-13
22	Ex	I Kings	Ps	Prov	Jer	Luke	Gal

	33-36	1-4	63-65	1	47-52	7-8	1-3
23	Ex 37-40	I Ki 5-9	Ps 66-68	Prov 2-3	Lam	Luke 9-10	Gal 4-6
24	Lev 1-3	I Ki 10-13	Ps 69-71	Prov 4	Eze 1-6	Luke 11-12	Eph 1-3
25	Lev 4-6	I Ki 14-18	Ps 72-74	Prov 5-6	Eze 7-12	Luke 13-14	Eph 4-6
26	Lev 7-9	I Ki 19-22	Ps 75-77	Prov 7	Eze 13-18	Luke 15-16	Phil 1-2
27	Lev 10-12	II Kings 1-5	Ps 78-80	Prov 8-9	Eze 19-24	Luke 17-18	Phil 3-4
28	Lev 13-15	II Ki 6-10	Ps 81-83	Prov 10	Eze 25-30	Luke 19-20	Col 1-2
29	Lev 16-18	II Ki 11-15	Ps 84-86	Prov 11-12	Eze 31-36	Luke 21-22	Col 3-4
30	Lev 19-21	II Ki 16-20	Ps 87-89	Prov 13	Eze 37-42	Luke 23-24	I Thes 1-3
31	Lev 22-24	II Ki 21-25	Ps 90-92	Prov 14-15	Eze 43-48	John 1-2	I Thes 4-5
32	Lev 25-27	I Chr 1-4	Ps 93-95	Prov 16	Dan 1-6	John 3-4	II Thes
33	Num 1-4	I Chr 5-9	Ps 96-98	Prov 17-18	Dan 7-12	John 5-6	I Tim 1-3
34	Num 5-8	I Chr 10-14	Ps 99-101	Prov 19	Hos 1-7	John 7-9	I Tim 4-6
35	Num 9-12	I Chr 15-19	Ps 102-104	Prov 20-21	Hos 8-14	John 10-12	II Tim 1-2
36	Num 13-16	I Chr 20-24	Ps 105-107	Prov 22	Joel	John 13-15	II Tim 3-4

37	Num 17-20	I Chr 25-29	Ps 108-110	Prov 23-24	Amos 1-4	John 16-18	Titus
38	Num 21-24	II Chr 1-5	Ps 111-113	Prov 25	Amos 5-9	John 19-21	Phile
39	Num 25-28	II Chr 6-10	Ps 114-116	Prov 26-27	Obad	Acts 1-2	Heb 1-4
40	Num 29-32	II Chr 11-15	Ps 117-118	Prov 28	Jonah	Acts 3-4	Heb 5-7
41	Num 33-36	II Chr 16-20	Ps 119	Prov 29-30	Micah	Acts 5-6	Heb 8-10
42	Deut 1-3	II Chr 21-24	Ps 120-121	Prov 31	Nahum	Acts 7-8	Heb 11-13
43	Deut 4-6	II Chr 25-28	Ps 122-124	Ecc 1-2	Hab	Acts 9-10	James 1-3
44	Deut 7-9	II Chr 29-32	Ps 125-127	Ecc 3-4	Zeph	Acts 11-12	James 4-5
45	Deut 10-12	II Chr 33-36	Ps 128-130	Ecc 5-6	Hag	Acts 13-14	I Pet 1-3
46	Deut 13-15	Ezra 1-5	Ps 131-133	Ecc 7-8	Zech 1-7	Acts 15-16	I Pet 4-5
47	Deut 16-19	Ezra 6-10	Ps 134-136	Ecc 9-10	Zech 8-14	Acts 17-18	II Pet
48	Deut 20-22	Neh 1-4	Ps 137-139	Ecc 11-12	Mal	Acts 19-20	I John 1-3
49	Deut 23-25	Neh 5-9	Ps 140-142	Song 1-2	Rev 1-6	Acts 21-22	I John 4-5
50	Deut 26-28	Neh 10-13	Ps 143-145	Song 3-4	Rev 7-11	Acts 23-24	II John
51	Deut 29-31	Est 1-5	Ps 146-148	Song 5-6	Rev 12-17	Acts 25-26	III John

52	Deut 32-34	Est 6-10	Ps 149-150	Song 7-8	Rev 18-22	Acts 27-28	Jude
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How To Pray

The Lord's Prayer

(Matthew 6:5-18 NKJV) "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. {6} "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. {7} "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. {8} "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. {9} "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. {10} Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. {11} Give us this day our daily bread. {12} And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. {13} And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. {14} "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. {15} "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. {16} "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. {17} "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, {18} "so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Some basic truths about prayer....

The passage above tells us a few very basic truths about prayer. They are that we should pray:

- 1) Believing that God hears what we pray even in secret.
- 2) We are not to pray for public show but so as to be heard by God.
- 3) That we are to pray for God's honour and glory and Christian work (His Kingdom). For things to be done right on earth as they are in heaven, for our basic needs, for forgiveness and deliverance from sin. This is a balanced prayer diet that proceeds from the most important items to the less important and which starts us praying in a positive and worshipful way.
- 4) The Lord's prayer can be used as a "backbone" to hang other prayers off. When you pray "Thy kingdom come..it can trigger you praying for something happening in your church, or on the mission field or the salvation of a friend. And so on with each of the sections of the Lord's prayer triggering appropriate reflections and requests.

Where, When and How To Pray

(Luke 5:16 NKJV) So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

(Hebrews 5:7 NKJV) who (Jesus), in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,

When Jesus prayed it was often a) alone b) in a quiet place c) with deep emotion and intimate language to God who He called "Abba Father" (literally "Daddy") d) with force and persistence e) with holiness and godly fear. This is a good pattern for you to follow. Find a quiet place, take your Bible and pour out your heart to God as fully as you can in a godly and reverent way. The words are not that important. God understands you. Just speak in a way that is respectful and truthful and yet bold and which really asks big things of God. He is our Father and He wants children that are willing to speak what is in their heart to Him.

What Is God Like?

How The Bible Describes God

(Psalms 90:1-2 NKJV) LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. {2} Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

(Exodus 34:6-7 NKJV) And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, {7} "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

(Isaiah 6:1-4 NKJV) In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. {2} Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. {3} And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" {4} And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

These are just some of the descriptions of God in the Bible. They tell us that God is everlasting and unchanging, that He is merciful, kind and gracious, that He is just and faithful, that He is holy and without sin. He is abounding in goodness and truth. He is a God we can trust utterly.

God Is Like Jesus

Above all God is like Jesus. Jesus is the "perfect image" of God. Jesus came to show us exactly what God is like. (John 14:9b-10a NKJV) He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? {10} "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? And (Hebrews 1:1-3 NKJV) God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, {2} has in these last days spoken to us by His Son,..... who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." And....(John 1:18 NKJV) {18} No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

Jesus is kind because God is kind. Jesus healed people because God likes to heal people. Jesus liked the poor because God likes the poor. Jesus taught the truth because God is Truth. Jesus was sinless because God is sinless and Jesus taught with authority because God is God. Jesus tells us what God is like but as an "image" as a small scale representation that we can understand. Jesus, though He was God, did not hurl galaxies around while He was on earth. He became like God at a human level. Jesus is our clearest signpost to what God is like. Jesus was uncompromising yet merciful, kind yet full of truth, wise yet humble. He always acted in love because God always acts in love and freedom. He is utterly free and wishes us to be free also.

Jesus used His great power to heal and help others. God also wants to use His great power to heal and help you. If you have prayed to receive Jesus Christ into your life and if you have submitted your life to Him the God's power is in you. Jesus Christ and all His power, resources and love has come to dwell in you. You have a huge power source right in the middle of your life. Call out to God and ask Him now to help you, to heal you and to show you how much power and love He has put inside you so you can continue to walk with Him.

What Has Happened To Me?

From Darkness To Light

(Ephesians 2:1-10 NKJV) And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, {2} in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, {3} among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. {4} But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, {5} even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), {6} and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, {7} that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. {8} For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, {9} not of works, lest anyone should boast. {10} For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The Big Change

There has been a huge change in your life. You have moved from being "dead in trespasses and sins" to being "alive together with Christ". God's life, which is "eternal life" has been put into your heart. God has come to live in you and be at home in your life. You have started to "come alive" and "wake up" to all sorts on new things. Things that were nonsense before now start to make some sense and there is a deep desire for God and for holiness in your heart. You want to belong to Jesus and to obey Him. You want to be with other believers and read the Bible and go to church. You want to do good things and you want to get rid of the bad things in your life. A new life principle is operating within you. Whereas before the life principle of sin and death led you now the life principle of righteousness and peace leads you. You are a different person. Your life is so different and so new that you can say "I have been born again" (John 3:1-18).

To fully understand this change you must realise that before you became a Christian you were a controlled person. You were controlled by "the prince of the power of the air" - the Devil. He might not have been around pestering you all the time but anytime he wanted he could "press your buttons" and you would do what he commanded. You were being spiritually manipulated by an evil power. That is why even "good people" who are not Christians end up doing things they are ashamed of and regret. Now Satan's ability to press your buttons are gone. They are no longer available to him. However you still have a storehouse of bad habits that you have made your own, a whole heap of wrong desires, angry thoughts and boastful intentions that are dear to your heart and for many people a whole bird's nest of confusion and anxiety that still has to be dealt with. God will clear these things up for you if you ask Him. He is your Saviour - not you yourself. He will rescue you from both the penalty and power of sin and very graciously from some of its consequences as well.

Why does He rescue you - is it that he likes being a sort of life-saver" Or is there more to it than that? God certainly delights in saving people but He does so for a purpose - that they may live holy and responsible lives and fulfill the plans and purposes that He has created for us. Note verse 10 above "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." By being God's workmanship it means He

deliberately made you, and deliberately made you a certain way. By "good works which He prepared beforehand.." means that God has a plan for your life, a plan full of good works for you to do. These good works will flow from the kind of person that He has made you to be. Lastly there is the phrase "for us to do.." that means you and I have to be active "doing' Christians putting our new lives into practice each day.

Meeting God's People

The First Church (when the apostles lived)

(Acts 4:32-35 NKJV) Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. {33} And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. {34} Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, {35} and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

A New People - A People of God

Being a Christian means being part of a "new people" (Ephesians 2:15, 2 Cor 5:17) we are introduced to the "household of God" (Ephesians 2:19) and have brothers and sisters in the faith. This means that something wonderful and supernatural can happen when believers gather together. The Holy Spirit dwell in the midst of God's people making it a 'temple of the Holy Spirit'. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17 NKJV) "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? {17} If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." These verses indicate that there are very severe consequences for people who disrupt or harm God's people - the church.

God uses different Christians in different ways. Some are powerful preachers, others can help the poor, yet others see are very good at praying while another person may possess gifts of leadership and administration. (1 Corinthians 12:1-11) We are like the parts of a body - some are "legs", others "ears", others "eyes" and so no. The Bible sometimes calls the church 'the body of Christ' we are the visible, on-this-earth representation of Jesus Christ. If Jesus wants to care for someone He will us a part of "His body" to do it. You and I thus have important functions in this world. We are not to be jealous or envious of one another but to build one another up in love - just as in our human body the arms acre for the head etc. We are to be a team. Much hurt can come when Christians compete with one another. This is absolutely wrong, We are to "maintain the spirit of unity in the bond of peace".

A Good Church

When you look for a church check to see that it has the following four things:

- 1. Sound biblical preaching that lifts up Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord and God.
- 2. Humble , godly and wise leadership. ("Red flag" attitudes include: greed, pride, moral looseness, and disrespect.)
- 3. The people of the church clearly love one another.
- 4. There is holiness and clear standards of right and wrong.

If you are unsure about a church then talk to some wise Christians that you know and ask their opinion of it. Or e-mail me at johnedmiston@yahoo.com . I will not favour one particular denomination over another but seek to give you sound principles and advice.

A Bad Church

There are some groups you need to watch out for:

1. Avoid groups that claim their particular group is the only group that will enter the Kingdom of God. They are often full of unsound teaching and manipulative practices.
2. Avoid groups that refuse to be upfront with you on the first meeting.
3. Avoid groups that are centred around a particular human leader who is often made out to be an infallible guide. Particularly if they ask for large sums of money.
4. Avoid groups that do not see Jesus as the only way to salvation or which mix together Christianity and other religions or which have "unique teachings" about Jesus.
5. Avoid groups that participate in the occult or which condone some forms of immorality.
6. Avoid groups that have "their own version" of the Scriptures or which add to the Bible.

Loving the Church

Once you have found a good church (there are no perfect churches) stick with it despite the ups and downs. Churches are full of people like you who make mistakes, aren't quite perfect and say things they do not really mean. One day someone may say or do something that really hurts you. Stick with it then - don't get bitter towards all Christians because of a foolish one or two. Remember some people who attend church are not really born again. Some are still searching, some are pretending, but the vast majority are really nice people. Here are three things you should take to church each Sunday.

- 1. Your heart to be filled with the Spirit. Go with an open and expectant attitude and you will receive.
- 2. Your eyes and your hands - to watch for the needs of the people of God and meet them in practical ways.
- 3. Your mind - to hear, understand and think about God's word. Some Christians think that faith and their minds cannot mix. That is wrong. Faith and a puffed up and arrogant mind cannot mix. But faith and an enquiring mind go hand in hand and create wisdom, knowledge grace and truth.

Breaking Free From Sin

We Have The Power To No Longer To Live In Sin

(Romans 6:5-23 NKJV) For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, {6} knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. {7} For he who has died has been freed from sin. {8} Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, {9} knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. {10} For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. {11} Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

{Romans 6:12} Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. {13} And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. {14} For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. {15} What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! {16} Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

{Romans 6:17} But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. {18} And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. {19} I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. {20} For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. {21} What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. {22} But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. {23} For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(1 John 3:9 NKJV) Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

The Struggle With Sin

The Bible makes clear that Christians have victory over both the penalty and power of sin. We often find it difficult to believe this because of the intense struggle we have with "sin in our members". (Romans 7, Galatians 5:16-18) 1 John gives us a clue on how to think about this when it says "he cannot sin because he has been born of God" - who cannot sin - that part of us that has been born of God and is a new creation in Christ! Christ in us is sin-free - as sinless as he was here on earth! When we die and God takes us to heaven then we will not sin any more. The part of us that lasts forever is free from sin. In fact it is so completely unresponsive to sin that it can be said to be "dead to sin". Our true eternal selves are sinless.

This is a powerful truth that can help us live the Christian life. There are two parts of us in conflict "the flesh" which is temporary and which stops having any influence

after we die or Christ returns, and the spirit which is eternal, spotless, undefiled and holy. Hence another name for all Christians is "saints" or "holy ones" because our true, essential selves are holy we can be called "holy ones". Now this battle between the flesh and the spirit can be very intense and very discouraging. In fact the apostle Paul cries out (Romans 7:21 NKJV) " I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good." This is the experience of all Christians and often makes us feel very condemned.

However there is a solution to this problem! (Galatians 5:16-18 NKJV) I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. {17} For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. {18} But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

(Romans 8:1-6 NKJV) There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. {2} For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. {3} For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, {4} that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. {5} For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. {6} For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

The solution then is to fill your life with the things of the Spirit and to direct your mind into the things of God so that "the flesh" and its interests do not get a look in. Set your mind on the things of the Spirit and you will have life and peace. To do this you should regularly pray, read the Bible, live according to its teachings and meet with other Christians. The more time you make for God - the less there will be for sin and self-defeat. In particular pray for these things :

- Grace- God to be kind toward you and give you many undeserved favours and the power to resist sin.
- Mercy - for God to deliver you from the messes you get yourself into especially when we are ignorant/foolish.
- Peace - the integration of your life under the blessings of God so that sin has no foothold in you.
- Understanding - of what God has done for in Christ and the power over sin that is within you.
- Wisdom & Discernment - so you can apply your understanding to real life situations.
- To Be Filled With The Love of God - which takes over our hearts and makes thinking spiritual thoughts easy.

To Be Filled With The Spirit - and able to see and perceive the things of God so that we are bold and joyful.

What About Heaven and Hell?

The Bible Describes Judgment Day

(Matthew 13:47-50 NKJV) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, {48} "which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. {49} "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, {50} "and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

(Revelation 20:10-15 NKJV) {10} The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. {11} Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. (Revelation 20:12-15 NKJV) And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. {13} The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. {14} Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. {15} And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

The Fixed-Up & Made New World

(Revelation 21:1-4 NKJV) Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. {2} Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. {3} And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. {4} "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Heaven & Hell

God is holy and must deal with sin. Sin can be dealt by us through repentance and faith and following Jesus in the pursuit of holiness. This way of dealing with sin leads to heaven. Or sin can accumulate and "store up the wrath of God for the Day of Judgement". People who have not dealt with their sin by repentance, faith and following Jesus will be destroyed - cast into the lake of fire. They are not deserving of, or fit for, heaven. They do not have a sinless "real self". Their real self is still sinful and wicked. Therefore it is destroyed and punished. Hell is not a sort of debauched party full of sinners having a good time, it is unrelenting anguish without any place for or possibility of rest and relief.

Heaven is the absolute enjoyment of the presence and power of God. It is where God's love is perfectly understood and where absolute total blissful happiness is normal. In heaven there will be no more crying or pain. It is ended. The days of suffering, meaninglessness, misfortune and calamity are over. It is a world ordered for good and for the very best. Should you go to heaven you will dwell in

unimaginable wealth - yet without coveting, you will reign with Christ - in humility and meekness, you will have a life that goes on for all eternity full of purpose, love and meaning. It will be a place where every scar on your soul is healed, where every tear is forgotten and where the life of God flows through you like an ever flowing stream.(Revelation 21&22)

What About My Friends?

When Friends Lead You Astray From God

(1 Corinthians 15:33-34 NKJV) Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." {34} Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

(James 4:4-5 NKJV) Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. {5} Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

(2 Corinthians 6:14-18 NKJV) Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? {15} And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? {16} And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." {17} Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." {18} "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

These verse are amongst the hardest in the Bible and they are there for a purpose. It is very easy to end up in relationships or alliances that are really counterproductive to our Christian faith. We are heading one way and they are heading another. Lets review these verse carefully. 1. Bad company corrupts good habits. This is an easily observed commonplace fact. Many new Christians try to keep company with people who are sexually immoral or drunken or greedy or ambitious and the pressure from these friendships soon draws them away from their relationship with Christ and back into the world. Recognise bad company - and avoid it.

2. Friendship with the world is enmity with God. There are three main enemies of God - and of Christians. Those enemies are "the world, the flesh and the devil". By the world the Bible means "Vanity Fair" the place where people clamber to get up the ladder, gain honours and be thought of as special without any reference to God or to eternity.(1 John 2:15-17 NKJV) Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. {16} For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world. {17} And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." Living for material gain, worldly status or sensual pleasure is what we call worldliness. It is incompatible with the Spirit of God. You cannot think and act "like everyone else" and be God's friend.(Romans 12:1,2) You cannot live for this world and for heaven at the same time. Possessions are not the stuff of the Kingdom of God.

3. Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. This passage is often quoted to say that Christians should not marry non-Christians. That is certainly true. We should only marry "in the Lord". However it is of broader application than that. This passage says that we are not to "yoke ourselves with" that is get into partnerships or close friendships with unbelievers where it is necessary that we "pull in the same direction". This may include boyfriend-girlfriend relationships, close friendships, some business arrangements and anything where we could be compromised by the friendship. The

spiritual nature of unbelievers is that they are controlled people.(Ephesians 2:1-4) They are controlled by "Belial", the Devil, and he can "push their buttons" from time to time so that they do what he wants 'despite themselves". This makes the partnership very unwise for Christians. Satan wants to "steal, kill and destroy" the people of God (John 10:10) and you have foolishly placed yourself right alongside someone who the Devil can control to do you maximum harm. That person may not will you any harm now but their weakness and vulnerabilities mean that they can "fall into sin" and take you with them. They do not have the strength to resist a strong temptation from the Evil One. This is a hard lesson to learn because many unbelievers are nice, attractive people. Older Christians have often learned this lesson the hard way and many will tell you of the pain they have suffered. You are not judging the person by denying the relationship. You are obeying God and He promises you an even better relationship if you follow Him. (2 Cor 6:16-18 NKJV)"For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." {17} Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." {18} "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

The application of this requires courage and wisdom. Courage to make the break from damaging relationships and wisdom in how and when to do it and with what words. Putting distance between yourself and the person does not mean an entire rejection of their personality. You are not to hate anyone. You are to love them with a cautious and wise love that refuses to get involved beyond the boundaries set by God.

Loving Your Neighbour

The Story Of The Good Samaritan

(Luke 10:25-37 NKJV) And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" {26} He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" {27} So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbour as yourself.'" {28} And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." {29} But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" {30} Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. {31} "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. {32} "Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. {33} "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. {34} "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. {35} "On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' {36} "So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?" {37} And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Love Of Neighbour

Love of God and love of neighbour are the two great commandments. They are repeated dozens of times in the Scriptures e.g. (1 John 3:16-18 NKJV) By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. {17} But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? {18} My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." There is a compelling weight to these exhortations. We MUST do the good works that God has prepared beforehand for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). This page is devoted to showing you how to fulfill this commandment. From the above parable we can see that the Good Samaritan a) perceived the need b) bothered to get involved in the mess c) paid the price of following it through to completion d) did so in an open-hearted attitude full of mercy and generosity. The Good Samaritan also got on with his business and let the person recover in peace. He was not a busybody or a sanctimonious do-gooder. There is something brusquely practical about him, almost businesslike.

Step One When we see a brother or sister in need we can give whatever immediate help we can from the resources we have available (and God always gives you enough to meet the need once you start using it "the loaves and fishes" principle - Matt 14:14-21). We must never ignore the need. To "close our hearts" is to squelch the love of God in us. (1 John 3:17)

Step Two We can then refer them to someone more able to help ("the innkeeper") but be prepared to still be involved and pick up the tab if necessary. This may mean

taking them to AA or Social Security and standing with them until things are sorted out.

Step Three Check our attitude. Are we being generous or are we resenting "having to get involved"? Are we merciful and gracious or do we view the person as foolish? Are we helping out in order to boost ourselves or because we had compassion on that person? We should still help even if though our motives are very mixed and pride creeps in. It is better to meet the need because that way we are keeping our hearts open to the love and mercy of God - these will, in time, correct our attitudes.

May I suggest an set of priorities for Christian compassion -

- 1. Our spouse
- 2. Our children
- 3. Our aged parents
- 4. The church,
- 5. The basic needs of the world.

Here are some verses that underlie my order of priorities:

(Ephesians 5:28 NKJV) So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

(1 Timothy 5:8 NKJV) But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

(Mark 7:9-13 NKJV) He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. {10} "For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' {11} "But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"; ' (that is, a gift to God), {12} "then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, {13} "making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

(Galatians 6:9-10 NKJV) And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. {10} Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

From Galatians we see that "doing good" is "especially" to Christians. From Mark we see that church comes behind parents, 1 Timothy says that providing for one's family is absolutely basic to being a Christian and Ephesians that spouses hold a very high place indeed - as high as our own bodies.

This is a common sense order and may help you sort out your helping role. Do not use it as an excuse though! Remember we are exhorted in Galatians to "do good to all" .(Gal 6:10)