

Becoming a Christian

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[0:00] Philippians chapter 3, verses 1 through 10, page number 981.! Please follow it in your Bible if you can.

It's in the pew in front of you or if you have one on your phone. Philippians chapter 3.

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord to write the same things to you is no trouble to me, and it's safe for you. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh, for we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh, if anyone else thinks he has reasons for confidence in the flesh, I have more circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

[1:28] For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible, I may attain to the resurrection for the dead.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Life is all about making decisions. Decisions.

One of the marks of transitioning from childhood to adulthood is that we begin to make decisions for ourselves. Many of you have already made decisions for yourselves by choosing to come to Glasgow to study.

But this is the beginning of a lifetime of making decisions. Who will you choose as friends? What university societies will you choose to join?

[3:01] Upon what will you choose to spend your money? No longer are others, for example, your parents, making these decisions for you. You must make them for yourself.

But the most important decision any of us must make is what we're going to do with Christianity. What we're going to do with Christianity.

Maybe you've been brought up in a Christian family, or maybe you haven't. But now you've moved into adulthood, you need to decide for yourself what you're going to do with the Christian faith.

Will it define who you are and who you'll be for the rest of your life? Or will you simply wear it as a convenient badge, wearing it when it suits, and taking it off when it doesn't?

Over the next few Sunday evenings, I want us to think through the topic of Christian basics. And this evening, I want us to begin with the issue of how we can become Christians.

[4:09] How we can become Christians. If you're not already a Christian, you need to listen very carefully this evening, because the next few minutes may change your life for the better or the worse.

If you're already a Christian, it's good to go back to basics, not least because if your friends ask you this week in uni what it means to be a Christian, you can give them a good answer.

Some people think that becoming a Christian is about believing certain things. And there's truth in that. There are certain things we must believe if we are to become Christians, but the devil believes certain things about God.

It doesn't make him a Christian. Some people think that becoming a Christian is about doing certain things. And again, there's truth in that.

There are certain things we must do if we want to become Christians. But becoming a Christian is not about what we do for God, but what He's already done for us in Jesus Christ.

[5:11] And then some other people think that becoming a Christian is about becoming religious. And again, there is some truth in that. But Christianity, as I hope we'll see, is not a religion.

It is a relationship with Jesus Christ. Human religion has had a largely negative impact upon human history.

But genuine Christianity has changed the world for the better. Well, if becoming a Christian is not about these three things, what is it about?

If anyone wants to become a Christian, what do you need to do? In Philippians 3, verses 8 through 10, the Apostle Paul, who himself had converted from Judaism to Christianity, tells us that we need to do the following three things.

Know, agree, and trust. And these three things spell the word cat. The kit to becoming a Christian is cat.

[6:19] So, in some ways, kit, cat, take a break, is a good hook on which to hang your decision on this matter. Because decide you must.

And decide tonight you must. Because if you don't, the chance may pass you by. Know, agree, trust. The three basic elements of becoming a Christian.

Know, first of all. Know. Twice between verses 8 and 10, Paul uses the word know. Knowing Christ in verse 8.

Know Him in verse 10. To become a Christian requires knowledge about Christ. We cannot say we believe in a Christ we know nothing about.

Becoming a Christian is not the path to ignorance, but the road to knowledge. And knowledge about Christ is what we need if we are to become Christians.

[7:24] Again, becoming a Christian is not the path to ignorance, but the road to knowledge. So what then do we need to know about Jesus Christ to become Christians?

What do we need to know about Jesus Christ to become Christians? In the first instance, we need to know who Jesus Christ is.

Many people think that Jesus never existed. He was more of a legend like King Arthur. However, there is more evidence for the historical life of Jesus Christ than there is for the existence of Julius Caesar.

Others think that Jesus was just a good man. Well, a good man He was. But if He was just a man, then some of the things He said about Himself are lies.

So if He was just a man, then perhaps He wasn't such a good man after all. He was a liar. Jesus was a man, but He was so much more.

[8:34] Jesus was the Son of God, both man and God. Some people call themselves atheists, but there are no true atheists because in our heart of hearts, everyone believes in God.

the God in whom Christians believe has a name and His name is Jesus Christ. Jesus did things only God could do and He said things only God could say.

On several occasions, He calls Himself by God's name. So to be a Christian means to know who Jesus is. But it also means to know what Jesus did.

It also means to know what Jesus did. Jesus lived a perfect life, He performed many miracles and said many remarkable things. He healed people with various diseases, He calmed wild storms, He brought people back from the dead.

He famously said, I have not come to be served, but to serve. He said of Himself that He would give His life as a ransom for many and that He was the good shepherd who would lay down His life for the sheep.

[9:44] He predicted that He would suffer on a cross and die for us. He would give Himself instead of us. He died the death we deserved by nature because we are sinners before a holy God.

Later, the apostle Paul would say, Jesus was the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. Having died on the cross, Jesus was buried.

But on the third day after His death, Jesus rose from the dead. He broke the chains of the grave and rose to eternal life. Forty days later, He appeared to His disciples and many hundreds of others and then He ascended into heaven.

To be a Christian means we know these things about Jesus. We know what Jesus did. So, to become a Christian means we need to know who Jesus is and what Jesus did. It's not as if when we become Christians we know everything about Jesus because the more we grow as Christians the more we learn about Him. But to become a Christian we need to know these basic things about Him.

[10:56] But now you know. So, a lack of knowledge about Jesus cannot be anyone's excuse tonight for not becoming a Christian. Okay.

No. Second thing we need to do if we want to become Christians is to agree. Agree. To know something is not the same as to accept it as being true or to agree with it.

To be a Christian means that we accept what we know about Jesus to be true and we agree with it. We know many things but many of the things we know are not true.

Many of you will have read fantasy novels like The Lord of the Rings and you'll know all the characters and the story but we know that The Lord of the Rings isn't true it's fantasy.

In reality there are no such things as hobbits and elves orcs and trolls. We know but we know that what we know isn't true.

[12:05] However when it comes to Jesus Christ it's different. Who Jesus is and what Jesus did aren't fictional they're all true. Jesus really is the eternal Son of God who shares in our humanity.

He really did die on the cross as the substitute for our sins. He really did rise from the dead on the third day to new life. There are many people who have been brought up in the church they went to Sunday school as children and they learned all about Jesus but they don't believe that the things they learned as children are true.

They think of these things with the same level of belief as they believe in characters from The Lord of the Rings. But it cannot be that way for someone who wants to become a Christian. In our case we hold these things about Jesus to be absolutely true.

It doesn't mean to say that we understand everything about Jesus. None of us understand how it's possible for Jesus Christ to be both God and man in one person. None of us understand how Jesus rose from the grave on the third day.

But even though we don't understand these things we hold them to be true. But not only do we believe not only do we believe these things to be true we agree with them. There are many things which are true we don't like or agree with.

[13:25] Andy Burnham is our prime minister but that doesn't mean to say you have to like him or agree with him. We all have to pay tax but that doesn't mean to say that you have to like paying tax or you agree with paying the amount of tax you pay.

There are some people who know that all Christians believe about Jesus is true but they don't agree with it. They willfully suppress the truth about him and fill their lives with other things.

To become a Christian means that we do not just accept all these things about Jesus to be true but we agree with them. We agree that the God the Son became a man to save sinful people like us to restore us to God.

We agree that Jesus died as our substitute to bear our punishment and give us eternal life. We agree that he rose on the third day to destroy death. It doesn't mean to say that we understand all these things perfectly but it does mean that not only do we believe these things are true we agree with them.

We like them. Do you believe that what the Bible teaches about who Jesus is and what Jesus has done is true? If you do you're on the side of historical evidence.

[14:49] You're on the side of the Bible and you're on the side of two billion Christians in our world today but most importantly you're on the side of God. If you're struggling to believe these things examine them for yourselves.

Many of you are professional students. Your job is to examine and study truth. If you're struggling examine the truth for yourself. So to become a Christian means not just to know the truth about Jesus but to agree with it.

And then thirdly trust. To become a Christian means to trust. To trust. Although we know in our minds it's very important to become a...

Although we know in our minds is very... Although what we know rather in our minds is very important to becoming a Christian it's not everything. We must believe these things for ourselves and place our trust in them.

Trust is one of the many words we could have used including believe, have faith, have confidence. To become a Christian we need to have confidence in Jesus to be our Lord, Saviour and Friend. [16:08] It's not enough that Jesus be our Saviour we must make him our Saviour. To use the famous language of that famous old Scottish psalm it's not enough to say that the Lord is our shepherd.

We must make the Lord our shepherd. Now I know that when I've got a sore head paracetamols are good to take the pain away. But what I know is of no use to me unless I break open the packet and swallow two paracetamols for myself.

I know that Jesus is our Saviour from sin and death. But what I know is of no use to me unless I make him my Saviour from sin and death.

Unless I take that conscious step to come to him in faith and trust. Unless I place my confidence in him. We all came in here this evening and we saw chairs.

Now we knew instinctively they are chairs and we agreed that if I sit in a chair it's going to hold me up. But what we know and what we agree to would have made no difference to us unless we ourselves had sat down on that chair.

[17:22] You sitting down on your chair is a sign of your confidence and the only way you benefit from what you know and agree to. In the same way you know and agree that Jesus is your Saviour from sin and death but it only benefits you if you have faith in him, trust in him and confidence in him.

In Philippians 3 verse 9 the Apostle Paul talks about being found in Christ and that is another way of saying being a Christian and having the righteousness of God.

That no longer does God look upon us as sinners, rather he looks upon us as sons. How does this become ours? How can we become Christians upon whom God looks as sons, not sinners?

Twice in this verse, verse 9, Paul speaks about how faith is key. that which comes through faith in Christ, that which depends on faith.

How do I make Jesus my Saviour, my Lord, and my friend? It isn't through what Paul calls their works of the law. There's nothing I can do to save myself from sin and death.

[18:50] That's human religion, trying to reach up to God by my own good works and my religious observances. Paul says, we make Jesus our Saviour, Lord, and friend through faith in Him.

That's how you can be forgiven. That's how you can receive eternal life. That's how you become a Christian. To trust in Jesus is having recognized that we cannot save ourselves asking Jesus to be our Saviour from sin and death.

It is to ask that God would make what Jesus did on the cross for sinners effective for me. It is to make Jesus Lord of my life, trying to obey Him in every area of my life.

It is to have confidence that what Jesus did on the cross by dying to take sins away, He did for me. It is to place the weight of my trust for salvation upon Jesus and not upon myself.

So, this is the kit for becoming a Christian. Cat, know, agree, and trust. We don't need to do these things perfectly.

[20:16] Even faith, as small as the tiniest mustard seed, is enough. Because it's not your faith in Jesus which saves you, it's the Jesus in whom you have faith who saves you.

Likewise, you may not be aware of each of these steps happening in your life, but as long as we get to the last one, trust, that's enough. Becoming a Christian is really very simple indeed, even if it's not easy.

So, this takes us full circle back to the beginning, and we're nearly finished. We all have decisions to make, and the decision you need to make tonight is what you're going to do with Jesus Christ. Your parents kind of make that decision for you, and I kind of make that decision for you. You have to make it for yourself. And it's no use waiting until you've finished university, or even until you get home tonight, to think about it.

God calls you to make that decision here and now, at this very moment. The apostle Paul who wrote Philippians wrote in another place, now is the appointed hour, now is the day of salvation.

[21:34] One thing I can promise you, that if you become a Christian tonight, it's the beginning of a path, a lifelong path to fulfillment, meaning, and joy.

not because you believed in a system, but because you're now in a living, growing relationship with a person, Jesus Christ. And what I want to do for the remaining two minutes is to take us through the four steps which will move us from knowing and agreeing the truth about Jesus to trusting in

Jesus.

Now, these are trusted steps. When I became a Christian in 1987, I took these four steps. How then can I personally put my faith and trust in Jesus tonight?

Now, these four steps are simple, A, B, C, and D. Something to admit, something to believe, something to consider, something to do.

Something to admit. This first step is probably the hardest. It is to admit that we are the kind of sinful people for whom Jesus died on the cross.

[22:50] It is to admit that I have not loved God with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind, and I have not loved my neighbor as myself, that my sins have separated me from God, and without Jesus, I will never be at peace with God.

To use the language of the apostle Paul, I have sinned, I have fallen short of the glory of God. In our society, nobody likes to be told that they're wrong, but the first step in becoming a Christian is to admit to Jesus that we've been wrong.

We've been wrong. Something to believe, secondly. And in a sense, we've already covered this step. We believe the central truths about Jesus.

I believe who he is, and I believe in what he's done, and I agree that they are true. I like them. I believe that he is both man and God. I believe that I'm the very kind of sinner Jesus died to save, and I believe that if I have faith in him, I can be forgiven of all my sin and have eternal life.

What we believe about Jesus makes the difference between life and death. It is to believe that Jesus is your Lord, your Savior, and your friend.

[24:14] Third, something to consider. Something to consider. We read in Philippians 3, verse 8, of how the Apostle Paul calls Jesus, my Lord, my Lord.

We must consider that as Christians, Jesus is not just our Savior, he's our Lord. He is now to be number one in our lives. He's to be more important to us than anything else or anyone else.

It means that we are to put him first in all the decisions we make. And this is going to require for the rest of your life a lifestyle of constantly turning away from all you know to be wrong and trying to live like him as he's revealed to us in the Bible.

We won't be doing it alone because Jesus will send us his Holy Spirit to live in us and give us strength to be like him. It means to consider that sometimes being a Christian isn't easy.

Sometimes it's really hard to go against the flow. So you must count the cost. Fourthly, something to do, something to admit, something to believe, something to consider, something to do.

[25:36] Having gone through these first three steps, we want now to do something. We need to invite Jesus to be our Savior and our Lord. In Revelation chapter 3, verse 20, the Lord Jesus says, Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me. Through his word and by his spirit, Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart tonight.

What can you do to open the door and let him in? So I'm going to do something tonight that I've never done before.

I haven't done it since September 1987. 1987. I'm going to lead you through the prayer by which I became a Christian all those thousands of years ago when I was just a wee boy.

September 1987. And you can choose to pray this with me now or after the service, grab me politely and then you can pray it with me then individually.

[26:53] individually. I'm not saying you'll necessarily feel any different having prayed it but if you truly mean this prayer you're becoming a Christian. If you're already a Christian then pray along with me and use this prayer as a prayer of recommitment to God and to the mission of the gospel.

If you are using this prayer to become a Christian this evening then please don't leave this building without telling someone. Without telling someone.

And remember now is the time of decision. Right now. So let's pray. Lord Jesus Christ I admit that I have sinned against God and others and have gone my own way.

I repent of my self-centeredness. I thank you for your great love in dying for me for bearing in my place the penalty of my sins.

Now I open the door of my heart to you. Come in Lord Jesus come in as my Savior to cleanse and renew me.

[28:24] Come in as my Lord to take control of me. And by your grace I will serve you faithfully in fellowship with your other disciples all my life.

Amen. Amen.