

INDISPENSABLE QUALITIES OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN

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Many in the "religious world" claim the name of Christ and call Him Lord, but they fail to listen as the scriptures teach few will be saved (**Matthew 7:21, 13-14**). According to a 2017 article by Pew Research, 2.3 billion people claim to be Christian. That's 31.2 percent of the world's population (7.3 billion), according to this study. Will all 2.3 billion who claim to be Christians be saved? Let us look at a few defining characteristics of a true Christian.



It all starts with *how* we're saved. People can't be saved if they listen to an unscriptural doctrine. A prominent religious leader David Platt has this to say about a popular false gospel:

I'm convinced many people in our churches are simply missing the life of Christ. And a lot of it has to do with what we've sold them as the gospel, i.e. 'pray this prayer', 'accept Jesus into your heart', 'invite Christ into your life'. Should it not concern us that there is no such superstitious prayer in the New Testament? Should it not concern us that the Bible never uses the phrase 'accept Jesus into your heart' (Platt)?

It *should* concern us that such an alternative is proposed as the gospel to millions of people because many souls have been led astray by this false gospel. Platt doesn't offer a solution, but he does cut to the heart of the matter: the true gospel is found in the New Testament (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**).

Our chief concern should be What did Jesus say about salvation? In **Mark 16:16**, He says,

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned." Believe, be baptized, be saved. Jesus does not have to say, "he who does not believe or is not baptized will be condemned." By the same token, we could say, "He who enrolls in college and does the necessary coursework will receive a college degree. He who does not enroll in college will not earn a degree." It would be pointless to do coursework without enrolling in college just as it would be pointless to be baptized if we do not believe.

Those who refuse baptism have not "put on Christ" (**Galatians 3:27**), are not buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life (**Romans 6:4**), have not had their sins washed away (**Acts 22:16**), and are simply not doing what the Bible says they need to do to be saved (**Acts 2:38; John 3:5**). We don't earn our salvation through baptism (**Titus 3:5**), but it is a condition precluding salvation.

Jesus teaches that to be saved one must change his life (**Luke 13:3**) and confess Christ (**Matthew 10:32-33**). Some might call these actions works. Jesus makes them conditions.

Christians obey the Word. Sadly, that Christians should obey the Word isn't self-explanatory to the "religious world." One would think that by 2020, false prophecies, false testaments, false prophets, and even false apostles would no longer exist, but they do. Instead of receiving the Word (**James 1:21**), some religions create their own faith through creeds. Others write their own version of the Bible, making scriptures say what they want them to say. Some even assert they received a message from God or promote new revelations from writers whose writings are contradictory. They follow prophets who live a life inconsistent with their own revelations and whose prophecies do not come true. For spiritual security, we must simply follow what the scripture says (**Galatians 1:6-10**).

Christians worship God the way His Word teaches. God has directed how He wants to

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MARCH 2020 NEWSLETTER

be worshiped, and we should obey. Cain, Nadab, Abihu, and King Saul offered to God what He did not command; consequently, God was not pleased. In the case of Nadab and Abihu, they offered fire God didn't authorize, and God sent fire right back down to consume them.

Christians make an effort to live holy lives. A common attitude is "nobody's perfect, so why try to be?" Scriptures say we are to be blameless (**1 Thessalonians 5:22-23**, **2 Peter 3:14**). How do we attain this feat? Through renewing our mind (**Romans 12:1-2**), crucifying the flesh (**Galatians 5:24**), and not feeding the flesh (**Romans 13:14**). Christians can't claim sinful perfection, but they can know they are forgiven when they obey the Word and live holy lives. And the Revelator gives assurance to those who are faithful: "*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (**Revelation 2:10**).

THE SYMBOLISM OF BAPTISM

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Water baptism is typically said to be just an "outward sign of an inward grace." Proponents of this idea say it acts as a visible "badge" or "sign" of salvation that has *already* occurred and thus has no place in the *attaining* of salvation. My friends, this idea is not biblical. The Bible certainly makes it clear that baptism is a symbol, but it is not the denominational kind of symbol: that is, that it refers to past salvation.

So, what does the Bible say? In Romans 6, Paul says Christ's death, burial, and resurrection are visualized in baptism (**6:3-5**). Baptism is called a "*likeness*" of Christ's death. As Jesus was buried in the tomb and then rose to life, so is the man who is buried in the watery grave of baptism, subsequently arising to "new life." The death of both Jesus and the sinner, then, are pictured in this act. Christ arose to life after being buried, and the formerly lost sinner emerges from the water to a new life, forgiven of sins (**Acts 2:38**; **1 Peter 3:21**) because of Jesus' sacrificial death.

Yet, what does Paul say here about baptism representing forgiveness that has already been achieved? Nothing! Not a word is uttered about it. Yes, baptism is symbolic, but

the new life of the lost sinner that it symbolizes is achieved at the same time as the immersion. In other words, the symbol and the thing symbolized are simultaneous.

FORGIVENESS AND UNITY

"New life" is a spiritual life the unbaptized believer previously did not have. This unity is attained by having his or her sins forgiven: that is, the sins that caused the separation (**Deuteronomy 31:17-18**; **Isaiah 59:1-2**; **Micah 3:4**; **Romans 6:23**). Where there is forgiveness, therefore, there is a new life of unity with Christ. The lost sinner who has believed and has repented achieves this relationship in baptism. Observe:

1) FORGIVENESS

Paul says the Christians at Rome were baptized "*into* [Christ's] *death*." The Lord's death paid the due penalty for sins (**Matthew 20:28**; **26:27**; **Romans 5:9**); but to benefit from that death, one must be baptized into it. One dies with Christ in immersion and receives the forgiveness that was made available by the Savior's substitutionary death. Paul says, "*for he who has died is freed from sin*" (**5:7**). Such a clear declaration! A man becomes justified, that is, forgiven from sin when he dies with Christ in baptism.

2) UNITY WITH CHRIST

Paul also says the Roman Christians were baptized "*into Jesus Christ*." Baptism is the point in time that God has chosen for the penitent believer to become united with Jesus. To be "in Christ" is to be united with Him in a spiritual relationship wherein one partakes of all the "spiritual blessings" found "*in*" Him (**Ephesians 1:3**). This relationship is to be identified as belonging to Him; therefore, "*into Christ*" and "*into His death*" are the same spiritual result—a union with Jesus. Thus, one **literally** rises to new life in Christ when baptized.

With the same thought, Paul tells the saints of Galatia they are the "*children of God by faith*" (**3:26**) and then says, "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ*." Faith in Christ and His redemptive work leads an unbaptized believer to be baptized and thus "put on Christ": that is, become unified with Christ. Unmistakably, Paul teaches that baptism has a purpose in the *receiving* of salvation and not as an act symbolizing *already-attained* salvation. Lost sinners become identified as the Lord's children by faith when they are baptized.



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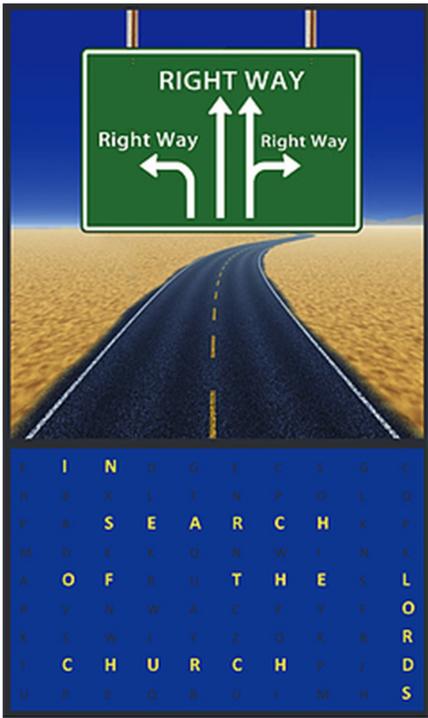
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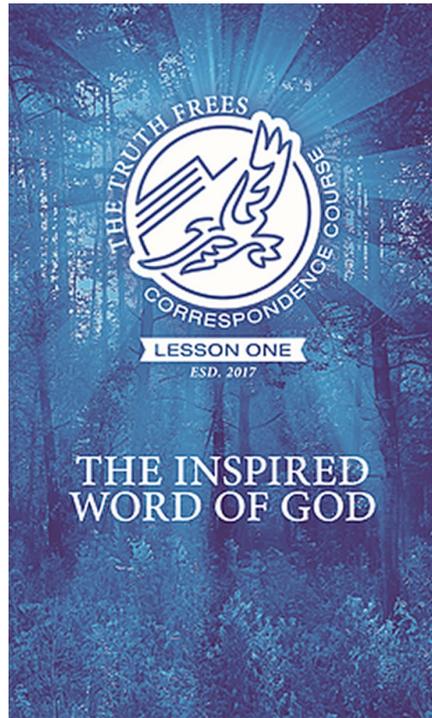
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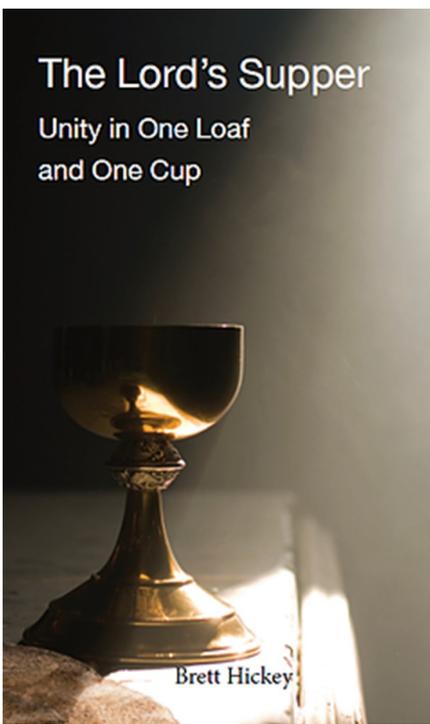
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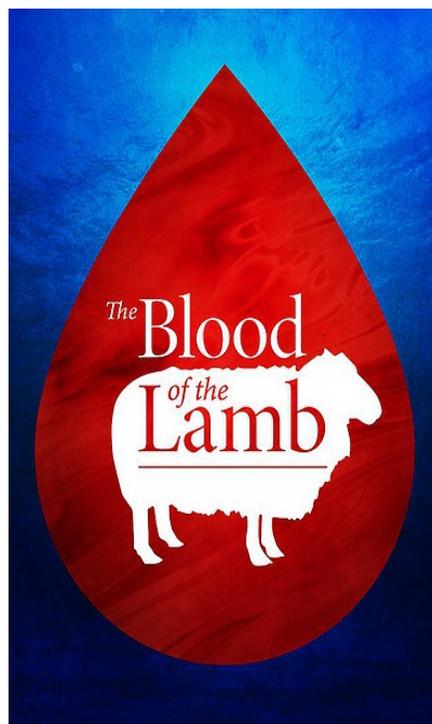
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