



UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

1. GOD created us to know Him and live with Him

"For God so loved ..."

The Bible begins with the creation of the Universe by the One true God. God always existed, and He is the creator of all things. He is all-powerful and loving. The most special part of His creation was mankind. We, uniquely among all the living creatures He made, were made in His image - to know Him and to have an close relationship with Him. He is the only one who should be worshipped, trusted and obeyed. The first man (Adam) and woman (Eve) lived in a wonderful garden that God had provided for them - where they had everything they needed and were given great freedom to care for God's earth and to enjoy the things He had made. God gave them only one rule - that they could not eat from the fruit of one tree in the garden - and warned them that disobedience would lead to death. This rule set the principle for them that they should live in freedom but within the limits that God had set for them and in a loving relationship with Him as their Master.

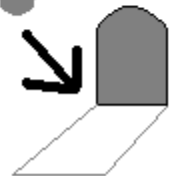


2. WE rebelled against God, resulting in death

"... the world"

Adam and Eve disobeyed the command of God. They were tempted by Satan, the enemy of God, and decided to follow his lies instead of God's truth. They decided that they could be their own masters and could live without God, making their own decisions about what was right and wrong, and seeking freedom without limits. This is what the Bible describes as sin - it is rebellion against God. Although they thought they could hide from God, they soon discovered that they could not - although they had thought they could create their own rules, they found that they were still confined by God's. The results of their sin were widespread:

- **Relationship with God destroyed** - the man and woman no longer had an innocent relationship with God. Their relationship with Him was broken. Over many generations in every society the knowledge of God was lost, and people tried to replace worship of Him with worship of false gods, created things and idols, or with systems of politics or philosophy to try and right the wrongs of society. The Bible describes this as spiritual death - we are cut off from the source of spiritual life, God.
- **Relationships with others corrupted** - sin led to corruption of human relationships, which became full of pride, jealousy and greed. The first son of Adam and Eve actually murdered his brother, and since then human society has been plagued by crime and selfishness.
- **Balance of nature disrupted** - the ultimate result of sin was ageing, disease and ultimately physical death for mankind. Our genetic material became prone to mutations that lead to inherited diseases and predispositions to other illnesses. This same process affected every other living creature on earth, and even the natural process of the non-living universe were disrupted, so that we have natural disasters.



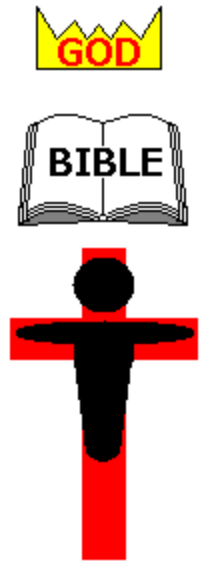
Not only do these problems affect the entire created Universe, but they will also have consequences for human beings after death. The Bible is very clear that after death the invisible soul returns to God, and will face His judgement. The human soul will last forever, but those who have sinned will not be able to live with God after death, and so will continue forever in Hell, separated from God's presence. Every human being born into the world inherits a sinful nature, and we soon act according to it by committing sinful acts ourselves. This sin leaves us guilty before God, deserving His judgement and punishment.

3. **GOD** spoke to us through the Bible, and finally through His Son, Jesus

"... that He gave His only Son ..."

Although we have sinned against God, God still loves us and wants us to know Him. He put a plan into place to save us from the results of our sin and to make a new relationship with Him possible. Even in the time of Adam and Eve God began to promise that one day He would send a special person who would rescue people from their sins. The Old Testament of the Bible tells how He chose one nation, Israel, to receive His words (now contained in the Old Testament) and to show His power to the other nations on earth. He gave them His Law, which gives guidelines as to how we should live, but which ultimately shows us just how full of sin we are - when we compare ourselves with its standard, we fall short. He also gave them many promises about the rescuer who would come, including promises about His place of birth, the fact that He must die as a sacrifice for sins and that all nations would come to know God in a new way through Him. God also gave Israel a system of sacrifices as a picture of having their sins forgiven. The picture was of the animal (often a lamb) dying in the place of the people, taking the punishment for their sin.

Finally, God sent the special rescuer to Israel. His name was Jesus, and he taught wonderful things about God and performed many miracles to prove that he really had come from God. In particular, He taught that all people can be made right with God, even those whose lives were full of sin. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and that He would have to die to fulfil God's rescue plan. He was put to death on a cross, but God raised Him to life again and He was seen by many people. The New Testament of the Bible explains that in His death Jesus took the punishment for our sins, so that we could be forgiven. His resurrection from the dead proves that He was really the Son of God (God living as a human being), and that His death really did pay the full price for our sins. He became the one sacrifice for sins forever - the only rescuer for mankind. He told His followers that they must take the message about Him out to people of all nations on earth. Because Jesus has paid the price, God's forgiveness is now available to us as a free gift.

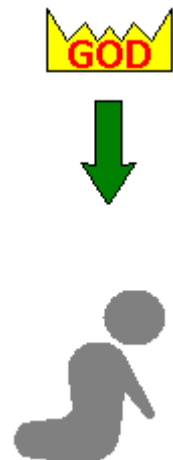


4. **WE** must respond in repentance and faith

"... so that everyone who believes in Him ..."

Although Jesus has died for our sins, we cannot be forgiven unless we are prepared to receive God's gift. We cannot earn it by doing good things - God already loves us even though we are sinners. To receive God's forgiveness we must first recognise that we need it - we can never be good enough to be right with God in our own effort - and that it is available for us - we can never be bad enough to fall outside God's love. We must also recognise that God is God, and we are not. In other words, He is the one we should worship and obey. We must turn away from our sin to recognise Him as the Master of our lives - acknowledging that He is always right. We surrender and give up our rebellion against Him. The Bible calls this repentance.

Once we have repented we can put our faith in Christ. This means that we trust Him as the one who can forgive our sins and lead us from now on in our lives. We believe that



He can and will save us, and that He can and will be our friend throughout the rest of our lives. Jesus becomes our Saviour and Lord.

One easy way to remember this is to think of three words we should be able to say to God:

- **Sorry** - I am sorry for sinning against You
- **Thank You** - Thank You for loving me enough to send Jesus to die for me
- **Please** - Please forgive my sins and take control of my life from now on

5. **GOD** receives those who come to Him through Christ and transforms them

"... will not perish but have eternal life"

The Bible tells us that those who repent and believe (turn and trust) in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour will be accepted by God (in other words they will become a "Christian"). This does not mean simply saying the words, but really meaning it from the heart. When a person does this their sins are forgiven and they enter into a new relationship with God as their Father. This is possible because God gives them His Holy Spirit, who will live in them and guide them into God's truth, changing their character to become more like Jesus. This does not mean that a true believer will never sin again, but that their life will become first about obeying and worshipping God. The Holy Spirit also gives Christians power to tell other people about Jesus and gifts to serve other people. He is always in the Christian, and His work is always to make them more like Jesus.

So, the true believer in Jesus has a new relationship with God, and becomes spiritually alive (this is sometimes called being "born again", using a term Jesus used). This spiritual life brings peace, joy and hope into our hearts, and it is a life that will never end, so that we know that after our body dies our soul will live on forever with God. Since our sins have been forgiven we have been found not guilty by God.

Becoming a Christian is the beginning of a new depth of life. To continue growing as a Christian it is important to:

- **Pray** - talk to God about everything, asking Him to show you how He thinks and what you should do. Every day ask Him to fill you with His Spirit and to use you to do His will. Tell Him about your struggles and ask Him to help you to remain obedient to Him through them. Tell Him about the temptations and doubts you have and ask Him to strengthen your faith and to give you strength to resist temptation. Pray for other people who matter to you, asking for courage to share your faith with them.
- **Encounter the Bible** - you should get a Bible in your own heart language and begin reading it. When you read, ask God to help you understand it. Then read what it says (not what you want it to say), meditate on it (keep thinking about it), and put it into action in your day to day life. If there are bits you don't understand, discuss them with other older Christians.
- **Fellowship** - You need to commit to being part of a local church where the Bible is believed. You should ask about baptism (a step of obedience expected of Christians), and also join in with Christians when they celebrate the Lord's Supper (also known as "communion"). Make meaningful friendships with other Christians, and share your life with them. Ask the church leadership about ways to serve and develop your God-given gifts.

