

QUESTION: "I AM A CATHOLIC, WHY SHOULD I CONSIDER BECOMING A CHRISTIAN?"

Answer: First, please understand that we intend no offense in the wording of this question. We genuinely receive questions, from Catholics, along the lines of: "What is the difference between Catholics and Christians?" In face-to-face conversations with Catholics, we have literally heard, "I am not a Christian, I am Catholic." To many Catholics, the terms "Christian" and "Protestant" are synonymous. With all that said, the intent of this article is that Catholics would study what the Bible says about being a Christian, and would perhaps consider that the Catholic faith is not the best representation of what the Bible describes.

A key distinction between Catholics and Christians is the view of the Bible. Catholics view the Bible as having equal authority with the Church and tradition. Christians view the Bible as the supreme authority for faith and practice. The question is, how does the Bible present itself? 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Scripture, of itself, is sufficient for the Christian to be thoroughly equipped for every good work. This text tells us that Scripture is not "just the beginning," or "just the basics," or the "foundation for a more complete church tradition." On the contrary, Scripture is perfectly and fully sufficient for everything in the Christian life. Scripture can teach us, rebuke us, correct us, train us, and equip us. Bible Christians do not deny the value of church tradition. Rather, Christians uphold that for a church tradition to be valid, it must be based on the clear teaching of Scripture, and must be in full agreement with Scripture. Catholic friend, study the Word of God for yourself. In God's Word you will find God's description of, and intention for, His Church. 2 Timothy 2:15 declares, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

A second key difference between Catholics and "**Bible Christians**" is the understanding of how we can approach God. Catholics tend to approach God through intermediaries, such as Mary or the saints. Christians approach God directly, offering prayers to no one other than God Himself. The Bible proclaims that we ourselves can approach God's throne of grace with boldness (Hebrews 4:16). The Bible is perfectly clear that God desires us to pray to Him, to have communication with Him, to ask Him for the things we need (Philippians 4:6; Matthew 7:7-8; 1 John 5:14-15). There is no need for mediators or intermediaries, as Christ is our one and only mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), and both Christ and the Holy Spirit are already interceding on our behalf (Romans 8:26-27; Hebrews 7:25). Catholic friend, God loves you intimately and has provided an open door to direct communication through Jesus.

The most crucial difference between Catholics and "Bible Christians" is on the issue of salvation. Catholics view salvation almost entirely as a process, while Christians view salvation as both a completed status and a process. Catholics see themselves as "being saved," while Christians view themselves as "having been saved." 1 Corinthians 1:2 tells us, "...to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy..." The words "sanctified" and "holy" come from the same Greek root. This verse is declaring that Christians are both sanctified and called to be sanctified. The Bible presents salvation as a gift that is received the moment a person places faith in Jesus Christ as Savior (John 3:16). When a person receives Christ as Savior, he/she is justified (declared righteous – Romans 5:9), redeemed (rescued from slavery to sin – 1 Peter 1:18), reconciled (achieving peace with God – Romans 5:1), sanctified (set apart for

God's purposes – 1 Corinthians 6:11), and born again as a new creation (1 Peter 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Each of these are accomplished facts that are fully received at the moment of salvation. Christians are then called to live, practically (called to be holy), what is already true, positionally (sanctified).

The Catholic viewpoint is that salvation is received by faith, but then must be "maintained" by good works and participation in the Sacraments. Bible Christians do not deny the importance of good works or that Christ calls us to observe the ordinances in remembrance of Him and in obedience to Him. The difference is that Christians view these things as the result of salvation, not a requirement for salvation, or a means of maintaining salvation. Salvation is an accomplished work, purchased by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (1 John 2:2). God offers us salvation and assurance of salvation because Jesus' sacrifice was fully, completely, and perfectly sufficient. If we receive God's precious gift of salvation, we can know that we are saved. 1 John 5:13 declares, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

We can know that we have eternal life and we can have assurance of our salvation because of the greatness of Christ's sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice does not need to be re-offered or re-presented. Hebrews 7:27 says, "He sacrificed for their sins once for all when He offered Himself." Hebrews 10:10 declares, "...we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." 1 Peter 3:18 exclaims, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God..." Christ's once for all sacrifice was absolutely and perfectly sufficient. Jesus declared on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus' atoning sacrifice was the full payment for all of our sins (1 John 2:2). As a result, all of our sins are forgiven and we are promised eternal life in Heaven the moment we receive the gift God offers us – salvation through Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

Catholic friend, do you desire this "so great salvation" (Hebrews 2:6)? If so, all you must do is receive it (John 1:12), through faith (Romans 5:1). God loves us and offers us salvation as a gift (John 3:16). If we receive His grace, by faith, we have salvation as our eternal possession (Ephesians 2:8-9). Once saved, nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39). Nothing can remove us from His hand (John 10:28-29). If you desire this salvation, if you desire to have all your sins forgiven, if you desire to have assurance of salvation, if you desire direct access to the God who loves you – receive it and it is yours. This is the salvation that Jesus died to provide and that God offers as a gift.

If you have received Jesus Christ as Savior, by faith, because of what you have read here today, please let us know by contacting us today. Welcome to the family of God! Welcome, Catholic friend, to the Christian life!

[original article found at: <http://www.gotquestions.org/Catholic-Christian.html>]