

NO RELIGION IN HEAVEN

There Was No Religion In Eden And There Won't Be Any In Heaven!

“RELIGION’S OTHER SIDE”

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Philip. 1:21

By Pastor Del Wray

There is an enormous difference between Religion and Christianity. Many are going to church but few are going down the road which leads to heaven, Matthew 7:13-14. Many name the Name of Christ, 2 Tim. 2:19 and claim to be Christians but few understand what a Christian really is. Many are religious but few are right with God. God’s men spend a lifetime teaching the differences and still the vast majority of church goers blindly, foolishly and deadly amalgamate Christ with man-made religions. Lying to gain an advantage is Satan’s method. May God help us to understand the difference between RELIGION and true CHRISTIANITY as set forth in the Word of God, the Holy Bible? Believe me, everyone who says they are going to heaven, aren’t.

You see, there is an eternal difference between Christianity and every other religion in the world: Christianity is not a religion! What are religions? Religions are about human attempts to make our lives right with God, through our good works, sacrifices, rituals, and money. However, Christianity is not a religion. Christianity is about God entering human history to graciously save men and women through His Son Jesus Christ. It is only by placing our faith in Jesus Christ and submitting to his Lordship that we will be saved.

A relationship with God will never be found in any religion because religions only offer swimming lessons to people drowning in the sea of sin. And it doesn’t matter how sincere or devout you are in your religious faith and practice because the sea of sin is eternally vast. The only hope for men and women drowning in the sea of sin is Jesus Christ. God entered human history in the person of Jesus Christ; he dove into the sea of sin in order to save desperate and drowning people. If you’ll allow him, he’ll hold you in his loving arms and bring you safely to shore. And after arriving safely to shore, then your swimming lessons begin so that you can go back and rescue others!

Before I continue to let me share some religious humor with you:

There were two lovers, who were really into spiritualism and reincarnation. They vowed that if either died, the other one remaining would try to contact the partner in the other world exactly 30 days after their death.

Unfortunately, a few weeks later, the young man died in a car wreck. True to her word, his sweetheart tried to contact him in the spirit world exactly 30 days later.

At the séance, she called out, "John, John, this is Martha. Do you hear me?" A ghostly voice answered her, "Yes Martha, this is John. I can hear you." Martha tearfully asked, "Oh John, what is it like where you are?" "It's beautiful. There are azure skies, a soft breeze, sunshine most of the time."

"What do you do all day?" asked Martha. "Well, Martha, we get up before sunrise, eat some good breakfast, and there's nothing but making love until noon. After lunch, we nap until two and then make love again until about five. After dinner, we go at it again until we fall asleep about 11 p.m."

Martha was somewhat taken aback. "Is that what heaven really is like?" "Heaven, I'm not in heaven, Martha." "Well, then, where are you?" "I'm a rabbit in Arizona."

That's what religion will get you, lies, lies, and more lies.

Religion opposes the other side and the other side is found in the Bible. Invented, it was, to fill the vacuum created by rebellion against constituted authority. The other side of religion is God's program for the reconciliation of His creation and that of fallen humanity. Religion is humanism versus deity, man's inventions opposed to God's gift, the work of man's hand against God's answer. The doctor's prescription unfilled. It is the fool's ladder to nowhere and man's darkened heart preferred to the light of day. "Religion is a set of beliefs, feelings, dogmas and practices that define the relations between human beings and sacred divinity. A given religion is defined by specific elements of a community of believers: dogmas, sacred books, rites, worship, sacrament, moral prescription, interdicts, and organization. The majority of religions have developed starting from a revelation based on the exemplary history of a nation, of a prophet or a wise man who taught an ideal of life." Religion is the creation of man and has always been the obstacle dividing men from Deity. The war is against religion and religion is against the Bible and the vilest enemy of man is anyone or anything that opposes the Bible. The danger is a religion!

Dangers of religions: On the individual level, believers cannot perceive the negative aspects of religion. It is the syndrome of the lobster when it is cooked alive. One places it in cold water and raises the temperature gradually until boiling. The lobster is numb, then dies and is cooked without realizing it. This may be called conditioning. Only those who are "unconverted" are able to feel, the harmful character of religions for the individual its: stifling, alienation, submissiveness, resignation, intellectual weariness.

As to the mutual level, one is only to look around oneself at books of history: wars of religion, inquisition, fanaticism, intolerance, the progress, confiscation of the political power. Monotheism, by its conception of a single god, carries the germ of intolerance. "The good all loving God, He is mine". All is said. As in the financial system, the worst is the monopoly of religion. With that, may be added other characteristics, specific to each religion, that nothing does but increase its dangerousness. The chosen race is Judaism; the universality of Christianity and Islam the religious State. Just look closely at the Country of France and its spirituality!

In France, after two Centuries of fighting, step by step against the Bible the "Spirit of Light" and secularity, the Catholic religion seems to be settled down. It recognizes its past errors, but grudgingly. Nevertheless, has it for at all lost its "venomous" character? Under the pretext of overtures, of return to the traditions and to the values that have made her history, the Catholic religion tries to find again its lost influence in society. The free man must remain "extremely vigilant" in order that "the Degenerates", do not awake. The same is true of Islam and a large part of questionable Christianity, "the spirit of Pharisaism." Take note what's on the other side of religion?

"The study of religion is not the same thing as the practice of faith, and therein lies the problem."

Jesus Christ founded Christianity, but not as a "religion" or with the intention of making it an exclusive type of "organization". "Christianity is an organism," a body His body, His Church. Rather, the Apostles were specifically instructed to spread the Gospel first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles, and then to the outermost ends of the earth. Christianity is not a religion. Christianity is not a denomination. Christianity is not a church building. Christianity is a relationship with God through the power and grace of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is trusting in Jesus and what He did on the cross for you, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, not on what you can do for yourself Ephesians 2:8-9. Christianity is not about religious traditions, ornate buildings, flamboyant preachers, rules, rituals or robes. Christianity is about truly receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. It's a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ made possible by the indwelling presence of the Saviour in every believer. "...Jesus Christ in you except ye be reprobates?" 2 Cor. 13:5. Religion is not on the same side as Christianity. Religion is what humans are doing Christianity is what God has done through His Son. What Christ has done! DONE!

Religion is a waste of time for Christians. Christians should be comparing their hearts to the timeless message of Jesus Christ in the Bible. Simply, heaven is promised to all who have been "regenerated", or "born-again", and is one of the promises that God has given to us in His Word. If we have truly received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we are promised to be in the presence of God immediately upon our physical death. No single denomination or religious group has a "lock" on the perfect knowledge of God. In fact, the Bible tells us that some truths will not be revealed to us in this lifetime. Only once on the other side will we know as God knows. The point must be made that the core beliefs of any Baptist or Christian denomination must be rooted in the Gospel. In God's Word! Is Salvation a gift or something to be earned? It must be that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not by any kind of works or deeds. It cannot be added to or subtracted from!

What a strange journey the practice of religion offers mankind. In every culture, whether primitive or civilized, there are "god-seekers." Imperfect man strives to explain his purpose and his world through a pursuit of some higher power. At some point, idols and images serve to represent that god. For example, the Greeks feared to anger any of their gods, even those they hadn't yet discovered. Paul said,

“For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you,” Acts 17:23.

While the Athenians were very religious, they were intellectual pagans with primitive deities comprised of evil spirits and demons like Chaos, god of nothingness from which all else sprang; Erebus, god of darkness and shadow; Hades, god of the underworld and wealth.

Man has created every religion as a method to redeem himself and to reach God through regulations, rules, or works. All religions center upon man’s own efforts to make things right with God. Through self-effort, works, people try to earn their way into heaven, salvation or some eternal reward. “God is what man finds that is divine in him. God is the best way man can behave in the ordinary occasions of life, and the farthest point to which man can stretch him.”

Ultimately, we all fall short of perfection, Romans 3:23. This leaves us with a feeling of failure, chronic guilt, apathy, and eternal separation from God. By simply practicing religion, any chance of a personal relationship with God becomes a burden and impossibility.

Religion is not the Answer. Is God to be found in the true meaning of religion? We can be assured that God longs for relationships, not rituals, humility not a hierarchy, and intimacy not insecurity. Religion implies fulfillment of conditions prior to God’s acceptance. **A fulfilling relationship comes through accepting God’s unconditional grace and mercy.**

"Almost all people, inside as well as outside the church, find that the notion of grace stands in contradiction to everything they understand by religion."

"The gospel of grace is the end of religion, the final posting of the closed sign on the sweatshop of the human race's perpetual struggle to think well of itself. For that, at the bottom, is what religion is: man's well-meant but dim-witted attempt to approve of his unapprovable condition by doing odd jobs he thinks some important, something that he will be thanked for.

"Religion, therefore, is empty, a strictly useless activity. It has a disastrous past and an insolvent future. There was no religion in Eden and there won't be any in heaven, and in the meantime, Jesus has died and risen to persuade us to quit it right now."

"I want you to set aside the notion of the Christian religion because it's a contradiction in terms. You won't learn anything positive about religion from Christianity, and if you look for Christianity in religion, you'll never find it. To be sure, Christianity uses the forms of religion, and, to be dismally honest, too many of its adherents act as if it were a religion, but it isn't one, and that's that. The church is not in the religion business; it is in the Gospel-proclaiming business. And the gospel is the good news that all man's fuss and feathers over his relationship with God is unnecessary because God, in the mystery of the Word who is Jesus, has gone and fixed it up Himself." There is no such thing as the Christian religion, Christianity is not a religion! Settle that!

Religion and its satanic source! Religion is the devil's playground. The diabolic efforts to inhibit and impede the gospel have been ever so subtle, as they turned Christianity into the "Christian religion," continuing to use the same vocabulary, and using the very inspired scriptures which were designed to be the written record of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the basis of their belief systems and morality codes. Ian Thomas writes,

"It is one of the subtleties of Satan which causes men to flee from God and seek to silence His voice in the very practice of religion. So it is that man, to suit his own convenience, has reduced God to a theological formula, an ethical code, or political program, a theatrical performance in a religious setting, the hero worship of some vivid personality."

To identify religion with the activity of Satan will seem to be blasphemous to those who have not differentiated between Christianity and religion. Once that distinction has been clearly made, however, the opposing alternative to Christianity that takes place in religion will of necessity be identified with the activity of the Evil One.

"Satan uses religion and the idea of 'doing good' to make people blind to the fact that these have no saving value whatever, to say nothing of spirituality. "Any system of religion is satanic in nature, no matter how beautiful the package might appear to be. Satan is the author of 'do good'."

Religion is often portrayed by the devil as a mass solution to man's problem. If he can get everyone into some religion, he knows that he can keep people in some false hope, in some anesthetic, and prevent them from seeing their real need. Nothing that Satan has ever devised has been as successful as a religion in blinding men's minds to the truth.

Satan's primary tactic in opposing God is not to foster atheism, but religion. A perverted 'Christianity' is Satan's ultimate weapon. If we are to understand religion correctly we must recognize its satanic source and the spiritual conflict that is taking place between God and Satan between Christianity and religion. Christianity is a person it is "Christ in you."

Christianity is not religion! Christianity is Christ! Christianity is "Christ-in-you." Jesus Christ did not found a religion to remember and reiterate His teaching. Christianity is the personal, spiritual presence of the risen and living Lord Jesus Christ, manifesting His life and character in Christians, "Christ-ones." Paul explained, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" Gal. 2:20. So we see a vast difference between religion and the Son of God. Let's look at religion in the revelation of Scripture.

The new covenant implemented in the Person and work of Jesus Christ was designed to supplant and supersede all of the old forms of religion that had existed since the fall of man. Careful study of the new covenant literature, which we know as the New Testament, evidences the constant exposure of the radical difference between religion and the dynamic life of Jesus Christ in the kingdom of grace.

Beginning in the accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels, Jesus Confronts Religion, it is apparent that Jesus was constantly confronting religion as He proclaimed the

kingdom of grace that He came to reveal Himself. The Pharisees and scribes of Judaism were the religionists who placed themselves in antagonism to all that Jesus did and said. They did not have the spiritual understanding to comprehend what Jesus was proclaiming. Approximately one-third of Jesus' teaching was in parables, which only served to befuddle the religious teachers for they seldom realized that Jesus was comparing their religious approach with the function of the spiritual reign of God that He came to bring in Himself. Eventually, the religious leaders realized that the parables were exposing them, and they began to take measures to silence their nemesis by execution.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke carefully explains that in the earliest history of the church, the initial Christian leaders were progressively made aware of the radical difference between the Christian gospel and all religion. Christianity had to be unencumbered and unhindered from any identification with Judaic religion. Peter's dream in Joppa, the inclusion of Cornelius and the Gentiles, the antagonism of the Jewish leaders in Judea, all represent pictures of the progressive awareness of how Christianity had to break free from all religion.

Paul's epistles bear the repetitive theme of explaining the difference between religion and Christianity. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul explains that righteousness is not in religious rites or the Law, but in Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. In the epistle we know as First Corinthians, Paul counters the religious excesses that were developing in the young church at Corinth. In the epistle we identify as Second Corinthians, Paul carefully differentiates between gospel ministry by the grace of God and the manipulations of the religious method being evidenced by the intrusive pretenders. Writing to the Galatians, Paul makes plain the issue of the gospel is contrary to religion, or the gospel versus religion, forcefully denying that there is "another gospel" as inculcated by legalistic religion. In contrast to religious exclusivism, Paul explains to the Ephesians that all men become a new humanity in Jesus Christ. Combating the effects of the local religionist of Asia, Paul wrote to the Colossians emphasizing the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, who is our life. In all of Paul's epistles, the theme of Christianity as distinct from and confronting religion is to be found.

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews likewise explains how the old and new covenants of God are to be differentiated, and the old tenets of Judaic religion are replaced by the life of Jesus Christ. The epistle of James indicates that merely going through the rituals of religion is vain, but Christian faith is the outworking of the life of Jesus Christ.

The Revelation of Christ as witnessed by John is indeed the climax of the new covenant literature. In pictorial form, Jesus reveals that religion will continually attempt to overcome and secularize Christianity as it was doing in the seven churches of Asia. Jesus is the victor over religion, Jesus: Victor Over Religion, though, and will overcome all the onslaughts of conflict that will inevitably come between Christianity and religion.

Throughout the entirety of the New Testament, there is a continuous explanation of the difference between Christianity and religion. Why has this not been made more apparent to Christians in order that they might be more discerning and cease to equate the two? Dare we explain that the interpretation of the new covenant scriptures has been done primarily by commentators and theologians who are thoroughly inundated in "Christian religion?" Religious

interpreters whose very livelihood is on the line would be hesitant to expose their own religious methods, even if they had the spiritual discernment to recognize that such religious practices were being exposed in the scriptures. We have witnessed a tragic misinterpretation of the Bible throughout the history of Christianity, turning it into a religion the "Christian religion" moving away from grace and the churches first love to and all inclusive belief system. What once was a personal relationship with man to a pragmatic form of humanism? It was the failure of man to recognize who Jesus Christ really was "God in the flesh" He alone was God, claiming to be God and backing up His claim with miraculous proofs. Scripture bearing this out with eye witnessing accounts.

First of all, the New Testament Gospels were written before the end of the first century. The book of Acts is highly important in this regard since it is a written record of the historical events of the early church. Acts do not contain the significant date markers, such as the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the persecution of Christians by Nero in 64 A.D., or the deaths of the apostle Paul and James each in 62. A. D. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that the book of Acts was written no later than 62 A.D., otherwise, it would have recorded these highly significant events. So, let's give the book of Acts a date of say 60 A.D.

Acts were written after the book of Luke, and according to most scholars Luke was written after Matthew which was probably written after Mark. Therefore, we have good evidence that the Gospels were written before 62 A.D., and since Jesus was crucified in 33 A.D. that means we have less than 30 years difference between the life of Christ and the records being written down by those who were there. This also means there's not enough time for legend to creep into the accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. This is what is so significant.

The Gospels contain the eyewitness accounts of the life of Christ. Since Jesus said that he alone was the way, the truth, and the life, John 14:6, which is an incredible claim, we then look to the miraculous events surrounding Him that support his claim. It is one thing to claim to be the only way it is another to demonstrate it. This he did by demonstrating some miraculous and unique abilities. First, Jesus fulfilled many prophecies written in the Old Testament. Second, he performed many miracles recorded in the New Testament. Third, he claimed to be God in flesh John 8:24; 8:58 with Exodus 3:14. Fourth, he died on the cross and physically rose from the dead 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Luke 24:39; John 20:27-28, according to the eyewitness accounts.

This means that Jesus backed up his claims with miracles. Has anyone else in any other religion fulfilled prophecy, performed miracles, claimed to be God, died and rose from the dead? Nope. Jesus is the only one. Therefore, Jesus' claim that he is the only way to God is true and this means that all other religions are not. On the other side of religion stands Jesus Christ Alone. Now let's look at a religious man who needed Jesus!

A Religious Man Who Needed God! Here is how John introduces us to this very religious man:

"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." John 3:1-2

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, Jesus wrote, that came to Him by night a member of the Jewish ruling council. Asking, Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him. A religious man Nicodemus was but lost.

In order to understand this story, we need to know two things about Nicodemus. First, he was a Pharisee. If you are a student of the Bible, you probably have a negative view of the Pharisees. You may think that all the Pharisees were legalistic hypocrites who hated Jesus. But that's not true at all. In the first century, the Pharisees were widely respected for their intense piety and deep scholarship. They were men who devoted their lives to the study of the Torah and its application to daily life. They truly wanted to obey God's law. That meant studying the Bible for hours each day, praying two hours a day, giving a tithe of all they possessed, and in general, being scrupulously concerned about morality. There were only a few thousand Pharisees because not many men would make that kind of personal sacrifice. Those who did were held in high esteem.

Second, Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish ruling council. This was a select group of 70 men who served as a kind of combination Congress and Supreme Court. They adjudicated various disputes and settled legal matters so that the Romans wouldn't have to get involved. As you might expect, only the leading men were elected to such a prestigious position. The fact that Nicodemus was part of the ruling council meant that he must have been highly respected by his peers. In 21st century terms, he was like a United States Senator or a Supreme Court justice.

That's the man who came to see Jesus one night in Jerusalem. But why come at night? Perhaps because he knew that Jesus was controversial and he couldn't risk being seen publicly. Or perhaps he wished to have time for a lengthy personal interview. I'm sure there were elements of curiosity mixed with a sense of duty. After all, this upstart rabbi had been gaining followers by the day. As a leader, he had an obligation to find out more about this man.

Surely there is more to the story than that. The fact that he risked his own position to come to Jesus speaks of his own personal need. Note what he said. "No one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him," Nicodemus admits that Jesus has been sent from God. He is no mere man; he's more than a teacher from Galilee. In Jesus Nicodemus recognized the mark of divine parentage.

BEING RELIGIOUS IS NEVER ENOUGH

All of it is meant to lead us to this important conclusion. Being religious is never enough. If it were, Nicodemus wouldn't have the time or the interest to meet Jesus. But he comes because, despite all his religious activity, there is still an aching void in his heart. Could it be that Jesus Himself can fill that void?

That brings us to the answer Jesus gives to this cultured, educated, well-respected religious leader:

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." (John 3:3-5). Let's focus on the key phrase "born again." In the original language, it has a double meaning. The word can mean "again" or "above." In this case, both meanings apply. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that the only way to find what he is looking for is to be born again from above. Despite all his learning, Nicodemus is utterly baffled by this thought. Is it possible to re-enter his mother's womb a second time? No, that's not what Jesus meant. He's not talking about a second physical birth, but about a second spiritual birth. You are born once physically. That physical birth introduces you to the physical world. But if you want to enter the kingdom of God (the world of spiritual reality), you need a spiritual birth.

Lest Nicodemus misunderstand this truth, Jesus added an important fact: "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'" (John 3:7). Notice the tense of that statement. You must be born again. The new birth is not optional for any of us. Jesus didn't say, "I recommend that you be born again" or "You should be born again if after investigation it seems to meet your personal need" or, "I think it would be a good idea to be born again." No! Jesus used the urgent language of forceful command. You must be born again.

We need a vital experience of spiritual rebirth.

Before we go on, let me remind you that Jesus spoke these words not to some immoral outcast, but to one of the most religious men of his day. By any standard, Nicodemus was a very good man and certainly a man we would admire for his intense devotion to God. Yet Jesus told him, "You must be born again."

Have You Been Born Again?

Nicodemus, needed to be born again, what about you and me? Let me put the question to you directly: Have you ever been born again? Just in case, I haven't made myself clear, I'm not asking about your church membership, your baptism, your confirmation, your giving record, your Sunday school attendance, or your personal morality. Nicodemus had the religion part down pat, but Jesus said, "**You must be born again.**"

All of us need to be born again. Good people need the new birth. Religious people need the new birth. Church members need the new birth. We all need to be born again, and if we're going to go to heaven, we must be born again. Without it, none of us will ever see the kingdom of God.

As you read this message, I'd like you to slow down for a moment and ponder the next sentence because it could change your life. Nicodemus represents all of us. He stands for every good, decent, law-abiding, upstanding citizen who ever lived. He was a good man who knew about God, but he didn't know God personally. That's the enigma of his personality. His story reminds us that religion is good, but the new birth is better. We need what Nicodemus needed because we stand in exactly the same place. We need a vital experience of spiritual rebirth. In short, we need what Jesus talked about 2000 years ago. We must do what Nicodemus did! That brings me to the central issue. If you want what Nicodemus found, you must do what Nicodemus did.

He admitted his need. He did that by taking a personal inventory of his life and realizing that despite all his best efforts, something vital was missing on the inside. In summing up, his virtues which were many and genuine this good man came to the conclusion that he needed “something else” in his life. He didn’t know what it was, he couldn’t put his finger on it, but deep within he sensed that his religion-sincere though it was could not fill the gaping hole in his heart.

Nothing else matters until you come to the same conclusion about your life. As long as you go blithely on your way thinking that everything is OK with your life, you can never be born again. It simply cannot happen because you do not feel your need for God’s intervention in your life. You must start in the same place that Nicodemus started with a sense of your own desperate need of God.

He came to Jesus personally. By that I mean he came on his own, by himself, individually, man to man. He sought and found the Son of God. Nicodemus could not send someone in his place. Nor could a committee have met his need. Salvation involves a personal, individual commitment of your heart to Jesus Christ. No one can do it for you, and you can’t make that commitment for anyone else. God makes the same offer to you that he makes to the entire world.

He trusted Christ completely. I realize the text doesn’t reveal to us the fact of his conversion, but I think it may be fairly inferred from the fact when next we read of Nicodemus, he is helping Joseph of Arimathea take the dead body of Jesus Christ down from the cross (John 19:39). This means he had “crossed the line” and was now willing to identify with Jesus publicly. The most famous verse in the Bible—John 3:16—occurs in this passage and promises eternal life to those who “believe” in him—that is, in Jesus Christ. To believe means to rely on Christ so completely to trust him so utterly and selflessly that you are casting all that you are and all that have and all that you hope to become on Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Nicodemus did this. So must you if you would be born again.

How to receive the new birth? John 1:12, you may be saying at this point, “I’d like this kind of personal relationship with Christ, but I don’t know where to begin or what I should do.” Well here is what the Bible says we must do:

God loves you and wants you to know him. The most famous verse in the Bible comes from Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus. John 3:16 tells us that God offers “eternal life” to anyone who will believe in Jesus Christ. God makes the same offer to you that he makes to the entire world. He truly wants you to be forgiven and to spend eternity with him in heaven.

Your problem is sin, which separates you from God. Romans 3:23 tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.” That simply means that no one is perfect because all of us have sinned in thought, word, and deed. Do you know how many sins it takes to send you to hell? Just one and most of us can take care of that first sin before we get out of bed in the morning.

God’s remedy for your sin is the cross of Christ. Romans 5:8 says that God demonstrates his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. By his death on the cross, Jesus Christ took your place, died the death you should have died, and paid the penalty for all your sins.

Your response is to trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. During a question and answer session, I was asked by a young girl named Mary who asked how you can know you are saved. I quoted 1 John 5:13, which says that you can know you have eternal life through believing in Christ. I told Mary that salvation depends on trusting Jesus Christ. It is more than just believing facts about Jesus. To trust in Christ means to rely completely upon him. Trust is what you do when you fly in a plane. You trust the pilot to get you back down on the ground safely. You trust a doctor when you take the medicine he prescribes. You trust a lawyer when you let him represent you in court. God says that when you trust Jesus Christ in that same way you are saved from your sins. All you have to do is trust Christ completely and you can be saved. When I asked Mary what she thought about that, she blurted out, "Wow! That's amazing." Yes, it is. It's the most amazing truth I know. All you need is nothing.

ALL YOU NEED IS NOTHING.

Dr. Harold Sigtler used to give this helpful explanation of what it means to truly trust in Christ: Faith is transferring your trust from your own efforts to the efforts of Christ. You were relying on other things to make you acceptable, but now you consciously begin relying on what Jesus did for your acceptance with God. **All you need is nothing.** If you think, 'God owes me something for all my efforts,' you are still on the outside. I love this sentence-"**All you need is nothing.**" Ponder that for a while. Dr. Sigtler was right. As long as you think you contribute something to your own salvation, you can't be saved. But when you stop trying and start trusting, when you "transfer your trust" from yourself to Jesus Christ, you can be saved.

Trusting Jesus for salvation means to trust him so completely that if he can't take you to heaven, you aren't going to go there. Let's review those steps to the new birth.

Do you understand that God loves you and wants you to know him? Do you admit you are a sinner and unable to save yourself? Will you accept the death of Christ as the sufficient payment for all your sins? Are you ready to trust Christ as your Lord and Savior?

Let's return one more time to the question I asked in the beginning. Are you a real Christian or just a religious person? A religious person goes through the routine but doesn't have the reality inside. A real Christian knows Jesus Christ because he or she has been born again. What is your relationship with Jesus Christ? Do you know him personally? Many wonder, "If I die, what will happen to me?" That's an important question because all of us will die sooner or later.

With all my heart I urge upon you the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Here is the good news of the gospel in one sentence. Your life can be transformed through Jesus Christ! Some are trapped in bitterness. Some are trapped in addiction. Some are trapped in sinful habits. Some are trapped in deep personal confusion. Some are like Nicodemus, very religious, very decent, very moral, very hardworking, and very good by all the standards of goodness and yet you wonder deep inside, "Is that all there is?" Jesus said, "**You must be born again.**" That can happen to you even as you read these words. In a matter of moments, your life can change forever. When it comes to the new birth, no one can be born again on your behalf.

What will happen if you are born again? First, your sins will be forgiven by God Ephesians 1:7. Second, you will be given a brand new life, the abundant life Jesus talked about John 10:10. Third, you will never face God's judgment you will never go to hell John 3:18. Fourth, you will be declared "not guilty" and "justified" in the eyes of God Romans 4:5. Fifth, you can know you are going to heaven when you die 1 John 5:13. All these things are given to you by God the moment you say "Yes" to Jesus Christ.

You must make a personal decision about Jesus Christ. No one can make it for you. Your parents may be godly people but that doesn't make you a Christian. You may have many fine Christian friends, but they cannot believe in your place. When it comes to the new birth, no one can be born again on your behalf. You must come to Christ on your own and put your faith in him as Savior and Lord. You must see your need and know your lost condition is deserving of hell.

Would You Like to Be Born Again?

Would you like to be born again? It could happen right now. You can start over right now. Your life can change in this moment. Ponder the words of this little verse:

"Upon a life, I did not live,
Upon a death, I did not die,
I risk my whole eternity."

That is what it means to be a Christian. It means trusting Christ so much that you risk your eternity on what he did for you in his death and resurrection. I have sometimes told people that trusting Jesus for salvation means to trust him so completely that if he can't take you to heaven, you aren't going to go there. Are you willing and ready to do that?

A religious person has religion; a Christian has been born again through personal faith in Jesus Christ. Perhaps it will help you to form your words into a very simple prayer. Even while I encourage you to pray this prayer, I caution you that saying words alone will not save you. Prayer doesn't save us. Only Christ can save. But prayer can be a means of reaching out to the Lord in true saving faith. If you pray these words in faith, Christ will save you. You can be sure of that.

Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I realize my sins have separated me from God. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I believe he died on the Cross for my sins. I believe he rose from the dead on the third day. Here and now, with all my heart, I trust Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus, and save me. Make me a brand-new person and give me a brand-new life. In Jesus' name, Amen!

If you have prayed this prayer in sincere faith, you may want to put your initials by the prayer along with today's date as a reminder that you have come to Christ in faith. I also encourage you to tell someone else today that you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Let's return one final time to our original question. What's the difference between a real Christian and a religious person? A religious person has religion; a Christian has been born again

through personal faith in Jesus Christ. It's as simple as that. Religion can't save you but Jesus Christ will. And He's the one who said, "**You must be born again.**" Christ in you places you on the other side of religion where Jesus Christ stands alone!

On the other side of religion stands Jesus Christ ALONE!

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST!**