

“Christians
need to *look*
more saved if
I’m to
believe...”

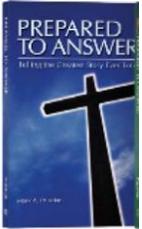
10:05am
November 8, 2020



I Need An Answer

“Christians have to look more saved if I am to believe in their Savior”

Devotion from God’s Word



The gospel according to Luke records the miraculous birth of Christ in Bethlehem. In his sequel, the book of Acts, Luke treats the miraculous birth of Christ's church in places like Corinth, Philippi, and Ephesus. Here we witness Jesus “born into the world” in a new way, following his ascension into heaven. His Spirit delivers him into the lives of those who believe in him; he is revealed all over again in the new Christ-like love the believers have for one another.

Three thousand people in the city that rejected the Son of God find out that he is real after all. That he is alive – “O God, what now?” – and that he forgives them. Into this peace they, with their little ones, are baptized.

In a community characterized by prayer and praise, togetherness and generosity form around the Word of Christ. Those who still stand outside can only admire what they see within. The number of the saved-by-grace daily swells.

A man named Paul, dedicated body and soul to the destruction of this church, is confronted by the living Christ on the road to Damascus. He is struck by a blinding light and knocked to the ground by the awfulness of that for which he had been most proud – he had killed the followers of Jesus. Yet there is grace even for him and water to wash even such ugliness away.

So begins his journey to tell the whole world about the redemption he found in the blood of Jesus. I wonder. What was it like to be let down from the walls of Damascus in a basket at night? Did Paul smile to himself as he was suspended for a moment, swaying in the dark, making his escape from his former way of life?

I wonder and I ask, Who are all these people?

Not angels from heaven. Not people appearing perfect in every way. They are the people of faith – repentant, forgiven, grateful, growing – and they happen to love one another.

Now the thing about history, as they say, is that it repeats. When a thing has happened once, the world is never safe from it happening again.

It is through the saved ones, such as they are, that the Savior is known. Then he comes.

Let's each and all read Acts 2:1-47; 9:1-31. Rev. Mark Paustian, *Prepared to Answer*; pp.192-193

CYNICISM AND CRITIQUE

List some things about the current state of the Christian church that might make people look down on Christians because of their lowliness.

-
-
-

What personal failings do you have that you feel threaten your ability to draw people to Christ?

-
-
-

Describe the following people gathered into God's Church. Why do they need to look more "saved" for someone to listen to them?

- Noah
- Abraham
- Jacob
- Moses
- David
- Elijah
- Peter
- Paul

What shortcomings are evident in so many historical and contemporary Christians even after being called to faith?

What makes a Christian?

Scan through the following list.

Which items do you think would be on most people's checklist for "What makes you a Christian."

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A Christian family | <input type="checkbox"/> Praying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making a decision for Christ | <input type="checkbox"/> Receiving Baptism and or the Lord's Supper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Living a good life | <input type="checkbox"/> Obeying God's Laws better than others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going to Church | <input type="checkbox"/> Keeping the Sabbath |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being a positive person | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading the Bible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being generous with our money | |

What is the one essential thing that makes you saved and at peace with God?

BEFORE THE CROSS...

Answering the objection of the Pharisees.

Relate the truths about holiness which God wants every Christian to echo.

Mark 2:16-17

When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" ¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 5:17-20 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Romans 3:19-24 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held

accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.

Explain the phrase “the ground is level at the foot of the cross.”

THE DIVIDING LINE

What is meant by Paustin’s following observation:

“Notice how one selfish man justifies his self-centeredness as a legitimate way to live, while another privately grieves over it and clings to Christ inwardly . . . and you would never know. Compare the first man and his same old, same old struggle to be good enough with the second man who endeavors to say thank you to God with his forgiven life. All you may see on the outside is that both strive. The one does good things to get God to love him; the other does them because God already does. At first glance they are indistinguishable. Although these two don’t appear to be standing on opposite sides of a great divide, they are.” -Paustian, prepared to answer p. 194

How does Tolstoy’s statement relate to your life? The Christian witness?

“Attack me, I do this myself, but attack me rather than the path I follow and which I point out to anyone who asks me where I think it lies. If I know the way home and am walking along it drunkenly, is it any less the right way because I am staggering from side to side! If it is not the right way, then show me another way; but if I stagger and lose my way, you must help me, you must keep me on the true path, just as I am ready to support you. Do not mislead me, do not be glad that I have got lost, do not shout out joyfully: ‘Look at him! He said he was going home, but there he is crawling into a bog!’ No, do not gloat, but give me your help and support.” -Leo Tolstoy

What are the dangers of pointing to ourselves as evidence of salvation rather than pointing people to the cross of Christ and his empty tomb?

SAVED AFTER ALL

How has God changed our sinfulness, our weaknesses, and made us so very unordinary in this world?

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. ¹⁵ For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?

2 Corinthians 4:4-7 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

What is God's evaluation of us?

Ephesians 5:25b-27 Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

CLOSING THOUGHTS:

Most of all, if it is appearances that impress you, take into account the difference that judgment day will make when the "sons of God [will] be revealed." When the hidden Christ appears, then we Christians will appear with him in glory.

I expect we'll look sufficiently saved then. -Paustin

You are critical of Christ's church? Guess what? So is Christ. "You have forsaken your first love," he told the Christians in Ephesus. "Luke warm," he called the congregation in Laodicea. After all, he is the one that has the right to criticize the church. You see, he happens to love her. He saved her.

She is his.

You look for genuine faith and something that can truly be called love to be found somewhere in her? He does too. And by his own grace and power, he finds them. "you have not denied my name," he tells her. "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." How are we going to look then?

- Paustin-197