

Evaluating the Reality of Christianity: Where Do We Go From Here?

4 May 2014

- I. Introduction
 - A. We come now to the end of the introductory portion of our Bible study; from here we will begin looking more closely at the message of the Scriptures from specific texts.
 - B. But today we are wrapping up the various ideas we have considered for the past several weeks.
 - C. Today we conclude by asking, “If I’m interested in becoming a follower of Jesus, where do I go from here?”
 - D. Some things to think about:

- II. Examining Your Motives
 - A. We all find ourselves seeking God because we realize we have a need.
 1. That’s not necessarily a bad thing since we really can’t come to God sincerely if we’re full of self-confidence.
 2. God is pleased when we sincerely come to him acknowledging our need, just like parents who delight to meet the needs of their child.
 3. But there’s an important difference between that and a selfish attempt at “trying God” or “trying religion” in order to get something we want.

 - B. We must come to grips with the fact we owe everything to God.
 1. God is the one who created you.
 2. God is calling all people to experience his grace in Jesus.
 3. You must come to God to give yourself, not to get something for yourself.
 - a. Everyone spends their life serving something, pursuing some ultimate goal.
 - b. Are you truly interested in *following* and *serving* Jesus? Making him the ultimate pursuit of your life?

- III. Counting the Cost
 - A. We have to start by realizing the magnitude of Jesus’s claims.
 1. Do you believe that Jesus is who he claimed to be?
 - a. There is no room to view Jesus as simply a good moral teacher—his own teaching doesn’t allow you that.
 - b. He clearly claimed to be God’s Son (a claim which caused him to be put to death), and if you believe he was not God’s Son then he must have been a liar.

2. Do you believe that Jesus can give what he promised?
 - a. Jesus was not simply a teacher of good morals.
 - b. Jesus offers eternal life—victory over sin and death.

B. We also must realize what following him involves.

1. The requirements:
 - a. Jesus calls people to abandon everything and follow him.
 - b. Jesus calls us to disregard our own lives in pursuit of serving him.
2. The potential costs:
 - a. Jesus does *not* promise that your life will get better or easier by following him: he's not offering to improve your life—he's asking you to give it to him.

"As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' And Jesus said to him, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' Yet another said, 'I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.' Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

(Luke 9:57–62)

b. What are the potential costs?

1) Social Conflict

"Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." (John 15:20)

2) Family Unrest

"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:37–38)

3) Your own life:

“Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me”
(Matthew 10:38).

3. Why was Jesus so emphatic about the difficulty of serving him?
 - a. Was Jesus simply seeking followers with a lot of endurance? Was he trying to eliminate the weak from coming to him?
 - b. No, Jesus was clear that no one, in their own strength, has what it takes to follow him, not even the wealthy and the powerful. That’s why his disciples were in despair, asking him if anyone could possibly be saved. He replied, “with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26)
 - c. Jesus is really after the hearts of those who would follow him.
 - 1) He sets up these comparisons to teach us that following him starts with finding him to be of greater value than all else (e.g., rich man—“go sell all you have” Luke 18:22).
 - 2) Following Jesus is *not* just adding him to the collection of idols on your shelf.
 - 3) He is teaching that there is no loss in giving up everything to become a part of his kingdom.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” (Matthew 13:44–46)

IV. Taking Inventory

If you are seeking God but still struggling with the idea of following Jesus, it’s important to identify the issues you are struggling with. Here are three types of questions to ask yourself as you think about following Christ:

- A. Content issues: “Are there any parts of the Christian message—creation, sin, Jesus as God, Cross, resurrection—that you don’t understand or agree with?”
- B. Coherence issues: “Are there still doubts and objections to the Christian faith that you cannot resolve?”
- C. Cost issues: “Do you perceive that a move into full Christian faith will cost you something dear? What fears to you have about commitment?”

V. Making the Move

What should you do if you find that Jesus is who he claims to be? Perhaps you realize that becoming a citizen of his eternal kingdom is worth far more than anything you could ever give up. How are you supposed to call out to God? The Bible calls every person in the world make a two-fold response to the message of Jesus:

A. Repentance—*What does it mean to repent?*

1. Repentance has to do with accepting God's view of your sin.
2. Is repentance, then, simply changing your mind about sin? Much more...
3. Repentance also includes sorrow for the sin our hearts used to enjoy and turning from them.

B. Faith—*How do I express faith?*

1. Expressing faith in Jesus means to place your unreserved hope and trust fully in him alone to deliver you from the judgment of your sins and to give you the eternal life he has promised.
2. What is involved in faith?
 - a. Knowledge—you have to understand the facts which the Bible lays out (sin's judgment, God's grace in Christ, etc.)
 - b. Agreement—you must personally accept the reality of these facts.
 - c. Trust—you must place your eternal destiny into the hands of Jesus, despairing of any hope in yourself to come to God on your own terms.

VI. Committing to Community

A. Following Jesus is not simply a personal matter.

1. God is seeking true worshippers from among all nations.
2. Following Jesus means joining the fellowship of his spiritual family.

B. God established the church so that followers of Jesus can find support and mutual encouragement.

1. There is certainly no perfect church.
2. But it makes no sense to become part of God's family and ignore your spiritual brothers and sisters.

C. Jesus is inviting you to become part of his spiritual family.

"Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'"

(John 14:23)