

# CHAPTER 8: A Miracle of New Life from Above

## Discovering the Life-Changing Dimensions of Faith

Reference: *Surprised by Faith*, pages 100-110 (fourth edition); pages 94-102 (third edition)

### Getting Focused

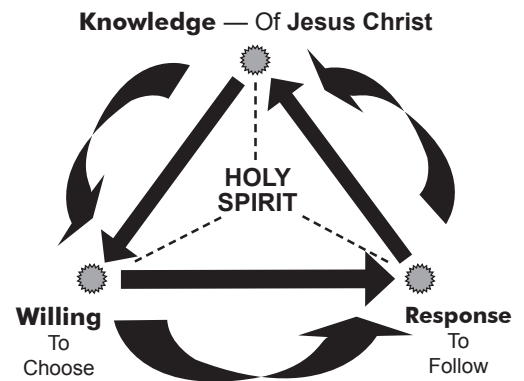
- Is Christian faith essentially adhering to a code of ethics that prescribes moral behavior?
- What if I become a Christian but can't keep up the lifestyle?
- Are there objective and observable results of Christian faith which I should experience in my life?

The Christian faith is often viewed as just another ethical system to regulate behavior. It is also often thought that to become a Christian means “turning over a new leaf,” “cleaning up your act,” or “getting religion.” This same thinking identifies “becoming a Christian” only with conforming to a prescribed lifestyle. These are serious misunderstandings. The Christian faith begins with a miracle in our life—resulting in a personal relationship with God. It also sets us free from performance in order to please God, and gives us a new hope—the assurance of eternal life in heaven.

### Making the Discovery

Becoming a Christian is more than subscribing to a certain set of religious beliefs.

1. Besides the three essential components of biblical faith identified in the previous chapter, becoming a Christian must also include a \_\_\_\_\_ component.
  - a. Jesus told the religious leader, Nicodemus, that he must have “\_\_\_\_\_” (spiritually and miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit) in order to become a Christian and go to heaven (John 3:3).
  - b. Jesus taught that everyone who believes in Him will receive the indwelling \_\_\_\_\_.
2. As a result of God's miraculous new creation within us, faith includes three life-changing dimensions.
  - a. Becoming a Christian establishes you in a new \_\_\_\_\_. Two personal beings, God and you, are reconciled through the forgiveness of sin. You become a child of God; God lives within you. In other words, you are family (John 1:12; 14:16-17).
  - b. Becoming a Christian releases you into a new \_\_\_\_\_. God's grace has set you free from the destructive power of sin to become all He created you to be. You do not have to perform a set of rules and regulations in order to earn God's favor, but are rather disciplined by grace and motivated by love (Ephesians 2:8-9).
  - c. Becoming a Christian qualifies you for a new \_\_\_\_\_. You realize there is ultimate and absolute justice. Death is not final. You can have the confidence of God's promise that He is preparing an eternal home for you in heaven (1 John 5:11-13; John 14:1-3).



## DISCOVERY #8

**“Ah-ha!”** Becoming a Christian is a **MIRACLE** of new life by the Holy Spirit resulting in a new relationship, freedom, and hope!

3. Faith is not merely subjective, but has \_\_\_\_\_ realities as well.

- a. The historical person of Jesus Christ is an objective reality.
- b. The observable results in a believer's life are an objective reality.

Both of these realities can be evaluated. A changed life can be tested in two ways. The first test is to consider the number of people who claim the same results in their life. For instance, if millions of people say they have each experienced inner peace, love and joy after becoming a Christian, it gives their faith greater objective credibility. The second test is to observe the behavior of those who claim to be Christians. Generally, are they more "Christ-like" than before they became Christians? If so, it gives statistical confirmation of the power of faith to transform lives.

## Application and Reflection

1. **The Bible says** that the Holy Spirit does a miracle of spiritual creation in our life when we confess faith in Jesus.

*"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive... (John 7:38-39).*

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17, NASB 2020).*

Discover more about this truth from the Bible as you answer the following questions.

- a. What is the miracle God does in us? (1 Peter 1:3, 23)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. Why is a miracle needed in each life? (Isaiah 59:2; John 8:34; Romans 3:23; 6:23a)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. What results when the Holy Spirit gives us new life from above? (Romans 8:1-2)

We all know people who are living their lives without faith in Jesus, but they are pretty good people; for example, an atheist who is a good citizen, kind to people and gives to charity. Are good people good enough to go to heaven? (The discussion below will help you to answer these questions.)

Everyone who contemplates that someone would be separated from God and spend eternity in hell ought to do so with tears in their eyes. It is not a thought that a Christian can enjoy or feel smug about. Emotionally, everyone wants to believe that a loving God would place everyone in heaven. However, our feelings are usually quite subjective and are not the way to arrive at objective truth. What are the biblical facts?

God, as revealed in the Bible, loves people so much that He has provided a way for all to be in heaven! According to Jesus, a person goes to hell because of his/her personal sin, such as independence from God and moral failure (John 8:24, 34). To have all people in heaven and out of hell, there must be a way to remove the sin that separates each and every one of us from God (Isaiah 59:2). God is willing to forgive, but cannot violate His holy and just character by doing so unjustly. That is, a righteous God cannot ignore or "wink" sin away. There must be an appropriate ransom or redemption offered that meets the just requirements of the law of God so that in love He can forgive us without Himself becoming unjust (compromised) in doing so.

Because all humans are sinners, they are incapable of offering to God the righteous ransom needed to redeem humanity, i.e., to make forgiveness possible for them. As recorded in Psalm 49:7, *"No man can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him..."* Every religion must address and resolve this dilemma. Nearly all do so by encouraging us to do good deeds that offset the sin. The argument is that if

our good works exceed our personal sins, then on the basis of merit we have earned a place in heaven. This approach ignores God's perfect holiness and justice, and assumes God will compromise both standards if we make a sincere effort. God can't do that without becoming immoral, i.e., violating His character and thereby ceasing to be an absolutely holy and just God.

Instead, "...*God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). God became incarnate on earth as Jesus, the Son of God, who offered His sinless life on the cross as the ultimate and worthy ransom, which satisfied the just character of God (Mark 10:45). Jesus' death was a substitute—He took the death we each deserve and offered eternal life to us in exchange (1 Peter 3:18). As a result, God forgives all our sin and declares that we are holy (no longer under sin's condemnation—Romans 8:1). It's free (i.e., to us—but it cost Jesus His life!) and is offered to us through God's love and grace.

Of course, we must embrace Jesus Christ as the resurrected Lord by a personal response of repentance and confession of faith (Romans 10:9). This is the Gospel of Good News which Jesus asked His followers to proclaim to all peoples everywhere (Luke 24:46-48; Matthew 28:18-20). Whether in person or by various forms of media, Christian proclamation of this Good News is now global. Therefore, for most people of the world, the dilemma is not a God who sends people to hell, but their ignorance of, or hardness toward, the true and freely-offered way to heaven. There is a cure for the disease called sin, but you have to be aware of—and willing to take—the medicine!

2. **The Bible says** that as a result of faith in Jesus Christ there are immediate and eternal consequences in our life.

a. We are set free from our bondage to sin and death.

*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith* (1 John 5:4).

b. We are adopted into the family of God.

*Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir though God* (Galatians 4:6-7).

c. We are empowered for obedience.

*...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure* (Philippians 2:13, NIV).

d. We are a testimony of God to unbelievers.

*"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16).

3. **The Bible says** there are even more things happen to a person who becomes a Christian upon confessing faith in Christ. Briefly record them. Have you recognized and experienced these in your life?

• Colossians 1:13-14

• John 1:12

• 1 John 5:13

• 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

## Looking Ahead

Are you willing to give God permission to miraculously transform you into a new person, and reform you more and more into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ? Hopefully and prayerfully your answer is "YES!"

But sometimes there can be a hesitancy or reluctance in our spirit to the changes God wants to make in our life. In fact, the Bible identifies one particular factor that keeps more people from faith and the growth of faith than any other. What is this stumbling block to faith? We'll discover that in the next chapter.

**Answers to "Fill in the Blanks":** 1. miraculous, new life from above, Holy Spirit; 2. relationship, freedom, hope; 3. objective