

THE FOLLOWING IS A DISCUSSION ABOUT JESUS CHRIST...who He is, what He claimed, and what He demands of each of us. These are not just intellectual questions for, according to Jesus, the answers are of the utmost importance, now and through eternity. If He is not who He claimed, then we should just move on, trying to find our own solutions to our problems, our pain, and our happiness in this world. But if He IS who He claimed, then the very nature of His claims requires our highest attention and concern.

I ask you to carefully, prayerfully, and earnestly investigate the following links.

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The Claims of Jesus


A very relevant detail that cannot be ignored is what Jesus says about himself. The fact is His self-claims are staggering! If the Bible is correct, Jesus looms above and stands apart from every other figure in history. No one else with an ounce of sanity ever made the lofty claims he did.

His claims...

- He accepted worship (Matthew 14:33, John 20:28), a practice every Jew knew to be reserved for God Almighty only.
- He claimed the right to forgive the sins of other human beings; a privilege every Jew understood to be reserved only for God Almighty (Luke 5:20f).
- He claimed to be able to do many miraculous things, and had many eyewitnesses testify to his supernatural deeds.
- "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58)
- He further clarified this by saying of himself, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). This claim aroused certain parties to plot His death (John 5:18, 10:30-33).

Significantly, a wide array of New Testament writers speak of this One born in a Bethlehem stable to Joseph and Mary as no less than the Creator of the universe (John 1:1-3,14; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2-3; Acts 3:15; Ephesians 4:10) and that the angels worship him (Hebrews 1:6-7).

In summary, the claim of the New Testament is that Jesus is God, the Eternal Son, who became a human being in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4, Philippians 2:5-11).

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Who is Jesus?

What is to be done with such astonishing claims? It is clear that the implications of these assertions are too enormous to just brush to the side. In fact, the choices open to us are surprisingly few. C.S. Lewis, a former agnostic intellectual who became a believer, has set forth the two basic options with crystal clarity:

"I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him, 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the sort of thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or He would be the devil of hell. You must make a

choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse."[1]

Although deception, either in the form of self-delusion or as a fraudulent parade before His followers, is a theoretical possibility, it is significant that very few skeptics have ever taken this line of attack. The reason is that the available evidence about Jesus points in the opposite direction.

Jesus Christ's teaching, for example, reveals an astonishing depth, and His moral principles showed an abhorrence of all forms of dishonesty. Indeed, the almost unanimous opinion regarding Jesus of Nazareth is that he was a person of extraordinary character. His appeal has reached across every social class and culture. And His is a character that has lifted up countless followers to a new plane of life. There is not a hint in the New Testament that Jesus was a less-than-level person. Rather, he exemplified strength and virtue. As Jewish scholar, Joseph Klausner acknowledged,

"Christ taught the purest and sublimest system of ethics...one which throws the moral precepts and maxims of the wisest men in history far into the shade."[2]

Nor is this portrait merely the product of imaginative fervor run wild. Real holiness is impossible for either individuals or for communities to invent. Attempts at such an enterprise typically result in a perverse portrait where certain qualities are exaggerated to an extreme, while other essential features are omitted. Genuine holiness is finally recognizable only after an encounter with the surprising person of Jesus of Nazareth. His life actually demolished all stereotypes of that term.

I invite you to do your own reading of the Gospels just in case you have been relying on faulty and second-hand information about Jesus. Many people are surprised to discover that the Jesus we actually meet in the Gospels bears no resemblance to the "meek-and-mild" caricatures that they had previously held about him. H.G. Wells, for example, though himself a staunch opponent of Christianity, admitted about Jesus that he was a "soaring personality" who was "too great for His disciples." And literary critic and playwright Dorothy Sayers paints the following portrait of him:

"It is we [in our generation] who have pared the claws of the lion of Judah... He was emphatically not a dull man in His human life-time. It has been left to later generations to muffle up that shattering personality... The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused Him of being a bore — on the contrary, they thought Him too dynamic to be safe."[3]

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Is Jesus Important to Me?

The Bible quite forthrightly states, "That soul that sinneth, it shall die," and "the wages of sin is death" (Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 6:23). In the moral government of God, He has ordained that physical and eternal death be the just penalty for sin. People may chafe against God's decree, thinking it is unfair or extreme, but their protests only show how sin has blinded them to sin's true nature. The fact that God requires such a drastic penalty should teach them, not that God is brutal, but that sin is heinous.

Yet God, in His matchless love for sinful man, has also decreed that the penalty for sin can be born by a substitute, and on that principle is built the Old Testament system for sacrifice.

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." – Leviticus 17:11

Even if any man had wanted to, he could not offer himself in payment for his sins, for his sin had disqualified him from being an acceptable sacrifice. Consequently, the Old Testament provided for the offering of certain select animals whose blood was shed vicariously for the sins of those who repented and trusted God's revelation.

All of the spotless, innocent animals that became sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed to that great sacrifice, the one made by Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. John the Baptist introduced Him, saying "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The penalty God imposed on sin is both just and loving, for God Himself, in the Person of the Son, paid that penalty for all who will accept Him as their Substitute.

God the Son, clothed in human form, shed His blood for man's sin, thus satisfying every demand of holy justice. And through that precious blood, God showed Himself to be both "just and justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

The Bible portrays unsaved man as a slave to sin and speaks of freeing him in the same manner as slaves were redeemed in the ancient world. In Christ, "we have redemption through His Blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain manner of life ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as a Lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:18-19).

Apart from Jesus Christ, all people are alienated from God. Sin's rebellion forged a gulf between God and man that is humanly impassable. Yet, Christ's blood built the bridge from God to man.


"Now in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." - Ephesians 2:13

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." - Romans 5:8-9

Human sin produces a pollution of the heart that can only be cleansed by God's grace. And that grace manifests itself in the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, the Apostle John declaring, "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses from all sin" (I John 1:7). While God will not look upon sin, we may still enjoy His loving gaze because of Christ's blood. Revelation's glimpse of the future glory gives this account:

"These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple." - Revelation 7:14-15

The Bible emphasizes Christ's blood because only in His sacrifice can we find forgiveness, cleansing, reconciliation, salvation, and glory!

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Why Was Jesus Killed?

At first glance, it seems that a God who loves sinful men and women enough to save them could devise a salvation plan that would not involve the death of His beloved Son. Is God unreasonably vindictive in demanding that payment be made for sin? Couldn't He forgive us without requiring some price to be paid?

These questions probe the very nature of God, and while we cannot fully understand God's infinite perfections, the Bible reveals enough about His character to give us an answer (Job 11:7; Deuteronomy 29:29).

While the Bible states "God is love" (I John 4:8, 16), it does not present love as God's sole attribute. Throughout Scripture God is portrayed as pre-eminently holy (Psalm 99:9; Isaiah 5:16), holy in character (Psalm 22:3; John 17:11), holy in name (Isaiah 57:15; Luke 1:49), holy in works (Psalm 145:17), holy in His kingdom (Psalm 47:8). The reason that Christians can count on God's promises is because He has verified them with His holiness (Psalm 89:35).

The resolution of the alleged conflict between God's love and His wrath lies only in His holiness. The same God can show both love and wrath because He is first of all holy. The angels surrounding God's throne sing neither "Love, love, love" nor "Wrath, wrath, wrath," but rather, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:3, Revelation 4:8).

God's holiness involves a strict separation from all sinfulness and perfect justice in dealing with the sins of His creatures. If God were to violate this basic attribute, His forgiveness would be well nigh useless. Of what value is the forgiveness of someone who has no standards? The concept of salvation makes no sense unless one starts with God's holiness. Consequently, sin is no trifle, to be lightly dismissed or conveniently ignored. The existence of sin necessitated some response.

The Apostle Paul dealt with this problem in Romans 3:21-26, and he shows how God could be both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (3:26). The main emphasis of this passage is God's righteousness, mentioned in verses 21, 22, 25 and 26. Since God's holiness remains an immutable part of His character, He will not merely overlook sinful rebellion. However, justice and mercy merge in God's plan for men, to provide the "righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those that believe" (3:22).

God does not have to violate His holiness to provide salvation, for God the Son provides "a propitiation in His blood" for those who believe (3:25). "Propitiation" refers to the satisfaction of divine justice and comes from the practice of anointing with sacrificial blood the mercy seat on the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant. This application of blood symbolized the death of a substitute as a penalty for breaking God's law. Jesus Christ became our Substitute, "For the wages of sin is death; but the [free] gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Jesus suffered on the cross, and the Apostle explains the suffering, saying, "This was to demonstrate His righteousness; because of the forbearance of God He passed over sins previously committed" (Romans 3:25). God had forgiven the sins of the Old Testament believers on the basis of Christ's future sacrifice, just as He forgives today on the basis of Christ's past sacrifice, done once for all time (Hebrews 10:12). And in it all, God remains holy. The crux of Paul's evangelistic teaching at Thessalonica was that "Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead" (Acts 17:3). Christ's death was not optional, for it was central to God's plan of salvation.

Some confusion results from the erroneous notion that God the Father must not have loved Christ since He required Him to die before granting forgiveness to sinful men and women. This ignores the plain teaching of Scripture that Jesus was God the Son, and, as equal in every perfection with God the Father, concurred in the redemption plan. On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come, glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee" (John 17:1). Hebrews 12:2 reveals that Jesus both endured the cross and despised its shame because of "the joy set before Him." While some modern errorists present Christ going to the cross under protest against the cruel Father, the Scripture shows the Father and Son in perfect harmony throughout redemption.

God's holiness, righteousness and justice are immutable parts of His character, so He exercises judgment on sin as One who is sovereign in His moral kingdom. Yet, He himself has fulfilled that righteous penalty in the person of His Son so that, without violating His holy nature, He guarantees forgiveness and justification to all who believe. **[4]**

What Should I Do About Jesus?

"Easter is not primarily a comfort, but a challenge," wrote J.N.D. Anderson, late Dean of the School of Law at the University of London. "If it is true [as he and others indeed demonstrate], then it is the supreme fact of history, and to fail to adjust one's life to its implications means irreparable loss."^[5]

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not about a mere historical curiosity, but an event of enormous consequences to you. According to Romans 1:4, Jesus' resurrection affirms the Bible's high claims about Him, and that He alone is the way to heaven.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." - John 14:6, NKJV

Christ's resurrection guarantees there will be a Last Judgment (Acts 17:31), and that there is a heaven and a hell (Revelation 1:18).

Yet this Risen Christ offers the forgiveness of sins and everlasting salvation for whoever believes in Him (John 3:16, John 11:25,6, Romans 4:24,25). Everyone is inescapably affected by these implications.

Your Decision? A New Beginning?

Therefore you can't afford to remain an agnostic regarding Jesus and His claim on you. While many today are indifferent to such matters, avoiding Him is not an honest proposition. The mounting evidence supporting His claims demands your consideration!

And consideration is demanded not only for your intellect, but for your whole being! For the One who is "Alive forevermore" (Revelation 1:18) says,

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me." - Revelation 3:20

By "door" is meant access to your heart, mind, and will. Jesus desires entry into your life that He may be your Savior and Lord. So "Today...Do not harden your heart" (Hebrews 4:7). Rather, open your heart to Him, and let the One who died and rose for you come in!

Steps to a New Life

If you are now at that place where you are saying, "Jesus, what can I do to have my life changed by You and to have eternal life?", then you need to act on the following steps:

1. **Confess your sins.** In prayer, talk to Jesus and tell Him how, no matter what you've tried, you've not done all He's asked of you. Tell Him of those times when you mocked Him, ignored Him, or defied Him by what you said or what you did. Confess that you've hurt others or behaved toward others in selfish or destructive ways. Jesus does not ask that you remember every detail of your life, but that you repent of your sins sincerely and from the heart.
2. **Acknowledge your need to depend on Him.** Confess that you have tried to live your life on your own and that all your efforts haven't given you true peace or happiness. Acknowledge to Him that you don't have the power to live a Godly life that would be pleasing to Him.
3. **Ask Jesus into your heart.** Ask Jesus to cover your sins with the blood He shed on the Cross for you. Ask him to come into your heart and live within you, and tell Him that you

want Him to take control of your life from now on.


If from your heart you sincerely prayed the above, then Congratulations! You are now a child of God, able to stand before the judgment throne of God covered in Christ's robe of righteousness, guaranteed eternal life with God!

Now that you are a brother or sister in Christ, I would highly recommend that you:

- Find a Bible-believing, Christ-centered church where you can grow in the knowledge, grace and love of Jesus Christ, and
- Study the Bible and learn more about what God's plan is for you.

Remember, God loves you, and wishes to bless you from now unto the end of time. You can trust His promises and rely upon Him not only for salvation, but for every aspect of your life.

May God bless you and keep you, and may He shine His light upon you and give you Peace!!!

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Notes

1. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), pp. 55-56.
2. Joseph Klausner as cited in Josh McDowell, editor, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, California: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972), p. 133.
3. Dorothy Sayers, *The Whimsical Christian: Eighteen Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), p. 14.
4. Authors: Henry Morris and Martin Clark as excerpted from *The Bible Has the Answer*, published by Master Books, 1987.
5. J.N.D. Anderson, *The Evidence for the Resurrection* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1966), p. 4.