



**WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL**  
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**But I've Always Been a Christian!**

By Tal Davis

The story is told of a man who visited some old friends in a different city. That night, as he was sleeping, at about midnight, a train roared by very near to his friend's house waking him up. The next morning he asked his host family if they heard the train? They looked at him a bit puzzled and asked, "What train?" They had lived by those tracks so long they no longer even noticed when the midnight train went by. They slept right through it.

People, especially young ones raised in evangelical churches, are sometimes just like that. They often have heard the Gospel presented so many times they are virtually inoculated to its content. It goes right over their heads. So we might sometimes need to ask, are people in our churches actually overexposed to the Gospel? Maybe, that's why we must never assume they really understand it. They may think they know all they need to know. They will say when confronted, "But I've always been a Christian!" Sadly, though, the truth never sinks deeper than the surface of their minds.

This leads to several important questions. For one, what exactly makes a person a Christian? Is it going to church? Remember the old saying, "Being in garage does not make you a car." Or, I say, "Being in a grocery store does make you a Green Giant!" Obviously just attending church, no matter what denomination or worship style, makes a person a Christian. A sad fact is that churches are filled with lost people. Perhaps one of the greatest mission fields is in our own congregations.

Another key question is, "How can we be sure if someone, particularly children and youth, have really comprehended the meaning and significance of the Gospel?" Being a Christian is not something that you inherit from your family or environment. One man in Scripture who may have thought he had learned all he needed to know about God was Nicodemus. He was a leader of the Jews in the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of Judaism. He had inherited a great religious heritage. He was one of God's chosen people. He was awash in a great religious environment – but he knew he lacked something.

*Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

*Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:1-6 NASB)*

That's how many people in churches are living. They are often overexposed to a superficial faith. The truth is, there are no second generation Christians. We can inherit religiosity, which may be filled with superficiality, but we cannot inherit real faith. That is a decision

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each must make for himself or herself.

One of my Christian heroes was John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Born into a deeply committed Anglican family, he ministered for years in England and America before he felt his "heart strangely warmed" while hearing a speaker talking about salvation by grace. At that point, Wesley testified to being truly "born again." When we are born physically into a family, we inherit our name, our physical features, much of our wealth, etc. But one thing we cannot get by birth is a relationship with God.

Likewise, being a Christian is not something we sort of "ease" into. You know how it is when we go in a swimming pool. Often we slowly ease in. The toe first to test the temperature. Then we wade in up to our waists. Then slowly dip on down up to our necks. That's what some are conditioned to think the Christian faith is like. But Jesus did not say to Nicodemus "Take your time, ease on in." He told the religious leader, "You must be born again!" That imperative implies a radical realignment of one's life and priorities.

Thus, being a real Christian requires a change of heart, mind, and behavior. It is what the Bible calls "Repentance." When someone repents and turns to Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, then they are "born again." This is a total transformation of one's life and goals. As the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."* (NASB). This is what theologians call "regeneration."

The great theologian W.T. Conner, in his classic textbook book on

Christian theology, said that this re-birth involves a moral or spiritual renewal that is affected by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

"This change is one that is wrought in the moral nature of man by the Spirit of God. Nothing but divine power could produce that change. Both experience and the Scriptures bear testimony to this. It is a new creation in which old things pass away and all things are made new (2 Cor. 5:17)... God's power works this change. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). God draws men to Christ (John 6:44)." (Walter Thomas Conner. *Christian Doctrine*. Nashville TN: Broadman Press, 1937, pg. 213)

What this means, then, is that if a person cannot testify to a life changing experience of coming to faith in Christ, then they may not actually be a Christian at all. They may be a church member, they may be baptized (by whatever method), they may take the Lord's Supper regularly, they may even be a preacher or missionary. To reiterate a sad fact, churches are full of unregenerate members.

That being said, we must also assert that being a Christian is *not* simply a matter of believing certain doctrinal tenets. Jesus said some people mistakenly think they are genuinely saved because they intellectually believe the right things. Now, certainly, there are essential doctrines that we must believe to be authentically Christian. In our articles and on our website we constantly make that point. Tenets such as the Holy Trinity, the full Deity of Christ, Christ's sacrificial death for sin, His bodily resurrection, etc., cannot be ignored, taken lightly, or redefined. For a detailed explanation of those doctrines go to the following links:

HISTORIC CHRISTIANITY PART 1 - <http://www.marketfaith.org/2020/06/what-is-historic-christianity-part-1>

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HISTORIC CHRISTIANITY PART 2 - <http://www.marketfaith.org/2020/06/what-is-historic-christianity-part-2>

HISTORIC CHRISTIANITY PART 3 - <http://www.marketfaith.org/2020/06/what-is-historic-christianity-part-3>

Nonetheless, as important as believing right doctrine is, just giving assent to them (or reciting a creed) is not adequate for salvation. Salvation requires that we put our faith in the person about whom the doctrines testify: The Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit.

Yes, some people will say, "But I've always been a Christian!" They may think so, but if we are to believe Jesus and the rest of the New Testament, at some point a person must consciously receive Christ as Savior and Lord and be "born again." We must never suppose that the people in our churches, or even in our families, have clearly understood the full meaning of the Gospel. We do not want it to be like a midnight train passing a house wherein everyone has stopped hearing it. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus made this sobering statement:

*"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out de-*

*mons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (NASB)*

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