

## HOW TO BE SURE YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN • BILL BRIGHT

My experience in counseling students and laymen through the years since I met Christ personally has convinced me that there are thousands of good, faithful church-goers who have “received” Christ, but who are not sure of their salvation. Regardless of how hard they try and how disciplined their efforts to please God, they are still uncertain of their relationship with Him.

Why does this heartbreaking uncertainty exist among so many who genuinely want to know God and have sought Him for years? I am persuaded personally that for many people this lack of assurance is due simply to misinformation regarding who God is, the true meaning of the crucifixion and the resurrection, and what is involved in receiving Jesus Christ as Savior.

Could it be that you yourself are still unsure of your relationship with God even though you may have been reared in a Christian environment and have “believed” in Him and in his Son for years? If you were to die this very moment, do you know for sure where you would spend eternity? Do you have the assurance right now that the Lord Jesus is in your life and that you are a child of God?

Or perhaps you have only recently received Christ and are still not sure that anything has really happened—you have no assurance of your salvation and have serious misgivings about where you will go when you die.

If you are among the vast multitude still looking for God, the next few moments could well be the most important ones of your life.

Becoming a Christian involves receiving by faith the greatest gift ever offered to man—God’s gift of love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and following Him as Lord involves one’s intellect, emotions, and will.

**Intellectual Understanding.** In order to become a Christian or to be sure that you are a Christian, you must have a clear intellectual understanding of what is involved. Christianity is not “a blind leap of faith.” It is built upon historical fact, documented by centuries of scholarship and research. Many leading scholars have dedicated their lives to investigating the life, teachings, death, resurrection, and influence of Jesus of Nazareth. As a result, we have more historical evidence documenting these events of His life than we have of the fact that Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo.

Jesus Christ claimed to be God. He said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). To become a Christian, you must honestly face these claims and believe intellectually that Jesus is God; that He died for your sins and was buried; that He rose again; and that He wants to come into your life and be your Savior and Lord.

**Emotional Involvement.** Being sure that you are a Christian also involves the emotions. An emotion is a feeling or reaction to a specific act, event or experience. The failure to distinguish between different types of emotions has caused many people to be confused in their relationship with God. Probably no one thing has caused more people to lack the assurance of a vital relationship with God through Jesus Christ, than a wrong emphasis on emotions.

One person may be aggressively extroverted and highly emotional, while another may be calm, reserved and introspective. Viewing the same act, or participating in the same experience, these two may respond quite differently—one with great joy and the other calmly.

Each person who receives Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord will have a different kind of emotional experience. Paul met God through a dramatic encounter on the road to Damascus. Timothy, on the other hand, was raised in a Christian home where he came to know Christ at an early age, and gradually grew in his faith. The fact that your experience with God may not be as highly emotional as that of someone else, does not make it any less real. We must not depend on our emotions, for they can be deceiving.

How, then, can one be sure that he is a Christian? Is there not some confirmation that God gives to the man who sincerely receives Christ? Scripture assures us of a threefold confirmation that Jesus Christ is in our lives and that we are children of God and have eternal life.

First, we have the external witness of the Word of God. Assurance is based on the authority of God's Word. When you meet God's conditions, as revealed in His Word, you can be assured that you are a child of God. Second, there is the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, who "speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we really are God's children" (Romans 8:16). Our changed lives are a third witness to the fact that we are Christians. "When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun!" (2 Cor. 5:17). This change may be sudden or gradual, according to the personality of the individual.

There is a place for emotions in the Christian experience, though we should not seek them, nor attempt to recapture them from the past.

We are not to ignore the value of legitimate emotions. It is more important, however, to remember that we are to live by faith—in God and in His promises—and not by seeking an emotional experience. The very act of seeking an emotional experience contradicts the concept of faith, which is the only way to please God.

Involvement of the Will. In addition to the intellect and the emotions, becoming a Christian involves the will. Our relationship with Christ can well be illustrated by the requirements for a marriage relationship, which ideally must contain these same three ingredients—intellect, emotions, and will.

For example, a man may be convinced intellectually that the woman who is his intended bride is the "right" one for him. He may be involved emotionally and love her with all his heart, but marriage requires more than the intellect and the emotions. It also involves the will.

It is not until the man and the woman, as an act of the will, commit themselves to each other before a minister or another person of authority, that they become husband and wife. The two words "I do" make the difference. So it is in our relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not enough to believe intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of men, nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. Though both are valid, one does not become a Christian until, as an act of the will, he receives Christ into his life as Savior and Lord.

There may be a difference, however between the marriage relationship and the Christian experience. In marriage, the sequence of commitment is often intellect, then emotion and finally, will. But in commitment to Christ the sequence is usually intellect, will, and, finally as a by-product, or result, emotions or feelings.

To be more sure that you are a Christian, you must be aware intellectually of certain basic scriptural truths:

First, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Second, man is sinful and separated from God; thus he cannot know and experience God's love and plan. Third, Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan. And fourth, we must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan.

Does this make sense to you? Have you ever personally received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? If you have received Him, do you have the assurance of your salvation? Are you sure that, if you died right now, you would spend eternity with God in heaven?

If you cannot answer "yes" to these questions, may I suggest that you find a quiet place where you can be alone and receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior right now.

If you have never received Christ by a definite, deliberate act of your will, you can do so now in prayer. And if you are not sure you are a Christian, you can make sure now. In either case, may I suggest that you pray this or a similar prayer of faith, making it your very own.

“Lord Jesus, I need You. I thank You for dying for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Lord and Savior. Thank You for forgiving my sins. Take control of the throne of my life. Change my life and make me the kind of person you want me to be. Amen.”

The decision to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, and follow Him as your Lord, is absolutely the most important one you will make in your entire life.