

Is your "Christianity" - GENUINE or FAKE? (Part 1)

God commands us to test ourselves, for *few* who claim to be "saved" will ever make it into the kingdom of heaven.

- **The apostle Paul warns us:** "Examine yourselves to see if your faith is really genuine. Test yourselves. If you cannot tell that Jesus Christ is among you, it means you have failed the test." (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- **Jesus warns us:** "Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as 'Lord,' but they still won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)
- **In a parable, Jesus warns us:** "The door to heaven is narrow. Work hard to get in, because many will try to enter, but when the head of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. Then you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Lord, open the door for us!' But he will reply, 'I do not know you.' You will say, 'But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' And he will reply, 'I tell you, I don't know you. Go away, all you who do evil.'" (Luke 13:24-27)

It will be horrifying to hear the words: "Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons!" (Matthew 25:41b)

So what's the difference?

It's all summed-up by the words "*belief*" and "*actions*." What you believe ("truth") will affect your actions ("lifestyle") - and Jesus came to bring *change* to both. This is the meaning of the word "**repentance**."

- You not only have to *believe* the truth about sin and salvation, but this truth must affect the way you *live*. This is what Paul preached.
"I preached... that all must turn from their sins and turn to God—and prove they have changed by the good things they do." (Acts 26:20)

Well, what do you *believe*? Try this little TRUE / FALSE quiz.

- _____ 1. Jesus is the *unique* Son of the one true God - and all other "gods" are false.
- _____ 2. The Bible shows us the only true way to salvation - and that way is through Jesus. All other "faiths" are false.
- _____ 3. Jesus rose physically from the dead. He is physically alive right now.
- _____ 4. Satan (or the "devil") is a real entity (a being who really exists), and not just a symbolic representation of "evil."
- _____ 5. The Holy Spirit is a real entity (a being who really exists), who indwells those who become genuine disciples (followers) of Jesus.
- _____ 6. Absolute moral truth exists, and we must live by this truth or we are living in sin. (We do not "decide for ourselves" what is right and wrong.)

THE ANSWERS:

What does the Bible say? According to the Bible, *each* of the statements listed in the quiz is TRUE.

CHECK IT OUT:

Each of the following verses says something about the statements listed in the quiz.

Job 1:6-7; Isaiah 5:20; Isaiah 44:6; Luke 24:39; John 14:6; John 14:16-17; John 16:13-14; John 17:17; John 20:25-29; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 4:6; Ephesians 6:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 2:12

Read the verses. Then write their references in the appropriate spaces below, next to the whichever statement it illustrates. (You are welcome to look for more verses that illustrate what the statements say.)

- | | |
|-------|---|
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***At this point, you have to decide whether or not you are going to accept what the Bible says. If you *do* accept it, then you have to ask the following question...**

Is this enough? Is merely believing a list of facts enough to get you saved?

Consider this:

Even *demons* believe the Bible... but knowing it is true doesn't mean they have become saved! Look at James 2:19! They know it is true, but will oppose the truth to the very end.

 Next we will look at the "*actions*" part of salvation.

Is your "Christianity" - GENUINE or FAKE? (Part 2)

What is a genuine disciple (a follower of Jesus) like?

Remember the meaning of the word "**repentance**"? It means *a change in the way you think and act*.

- ***We must change our views about life and reality***, so that the way we think agrees with the Bible.
We looked at this briefly, in PART 1. Most people who consider themselves "saved" do not believe much of what the Bible says.
- ***We must also change the way we live***, so that it conforms to these new (changed) views.
We will look at this here, in PART 2. You will see that most people who call themselves "saved" do not live the way the Bible says they must.

A genuine disciple of Jesus is a changed person. He has...

(1) ... **A CHANGED NATURE**

Before... *Spiritually dead, with a physical body that is going to die.*

Before the change, even the "good" things you do are done in a way that reflects this spiritual death. So even when you do "good" things, you cannot please God, or earn your way into heaven.

After... *Spiritually alive and waiting for a physical body that **cannot** die.*

At the present, you may look the same on the "outside," but a genuine change has taken place on the "inside" - which affects every aspect of your life. (The change on the "outside" will be more evident at the resurrection, when you receive a body that cannot die.)

PROVE IT! What do these verses teach us? 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:1-5 (+); John 3:3

(2) ... **A CHANGED FOCUS IN LIFE**

Before... *Living for yourself and for your values; unconscious (dead) to the ways of God.*

You decide what is most important to you. It may be obviously self-centered. Or it may be focused on other things (such as people, the world or religion), but with a neglect of what God calls *most important*.

After... *Dying to yourself; living for Christ and for his values; loving Jesus more than you love anything else.*

This does not necessarily mean a physical death, but a "crucifixion" of your self-interests, so that you can *follow* Jesus and have a life based on his values.

PROVE IT! What do these verses teach us? Galatians 2:19-20; Mark 8:34-38; John 14:15, 21, 23-24

(3) ... A CHANGED ATTITUDE TOWARD WHAT THE WORLD OFFERS

Before... Following the ways of the world; accepting and doing what is popular in your "group."
Following the group will tend to be more important than finding out if the choices are good or bad!
Sometimes it may be bad, but even a "good" thing may become bad if it is a *substitute* for something that God says is *more important*.

After... Following the ways of God; accepting anything that honors God and rejecting anything that doesn't; "seeking first" whatever is a part of God's kingdom.
Though you live in the world, you are no longer a part of it, if you are a disciple of Jesus. What the world offers has less meaning to you; but what pleases God and brings him honor is of *extreme* importance.

PROVE IT! What do these verses teach us? Romans 12:2; 1 Peter 2:11-12; Matthew 6:33; 1 John 2:15-17; Hebrews 11:8-10, 13b-16, 24-26 (examples from the Old Testament)

(4) ... A CHANGED PURPOSE FOR LIVING

Before... Living for the types of things the world tells us to live for; living for *temporary* things.
This may be a career, a "good life" (however you may want to define it), living for a "cause," etc. It can even include doing "good" for others, or being "religious," but these things will not be done in the way God requires. (The devil is an expert counterfeiter.)

After... Living to express love for God and neighbor.
Living with a desire to honor God in *every* activity of life (or, *not* doing the activity if it dishonors him).
Living in a way that expresses love for your "neighbor" (including your enemies); doing things in a way that builds-up other people and benefits them; and (most importantly), attempting to show them the way to Christ (by what you say and by what you do).

PROVE IT! What do these verses teach us? 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; James 1:27; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 10:31

★ ALL OF THIS OCCURS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF "TRUST" ★

We *trust* God to accomplish *in us* the changes that we ourselves could not do.

"For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him." (Philippians 2:13)

Being a disciple ...

IT HAS VERY LITTLE TO DO WITH THE WORD "RELIGION"

The Bible uses the word "religion" only once in connection with being a disciple of Jesus - and it focuses on the disciple's *response of love*, made possible by the changes that have *already* taken place in his life. It has *nothing* to do with what most people mean, when they use the word "religion."

IT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH THE WORD "RELATIONSHIP"

A relationship with Jesus - not only as creator, king and judge, but also as savior, brother and friend. It is a relationship that is *always* accompanied by the *changes* that are described above.

Is your "Christianity" - GENUINE or FAKE? (Part 3)

We have a serious problem!

Many people say that to become a "Christian," all you have to do is to "accept" or "receive" Christ. But what does this mean? And how is this supposed to impact your life?

- This concept is often left undefined, leaving the person to guess what it means.
[Many people think that all a person has to do is "be good" and they will "earn a place in heaven." Others think they will get "saved" by reciting a prayer, by "making a decision," or by getting baptized.]
- Many people who claim to be "saved" go through life without ever actually knowing what the Bible says about being "saved" - and they often have no idea what it says about other issues, either.
[Review the "quiz" given in PART 1 of this study. Do you realize that 50% to 70% of teens who claim to have "accepted Christ" would say that those statements are FALSE?]

Many people claim to be "saved" yet do not live it. Others live it for a while and later "fall away."

- Scripture tells us that the way you live is just as important as what you claim to believe. The two are actually *inseparable*. You cannot "live like the devil" and still "make it to heaven." Think about the following verse. It is an example of people who claim one thing but live something different:

Such people claim they know God, but they deny him by the way they live. They are despicable and disobedient, worthless for doing anything good. (Titus 1:16)
- What about people who claim to be Christians, but who later abandon Christ - or even become hostile to Christ? Did they get "unsaved"? Or were they never really saved in the first place?
[Read 1 John 2:18-19. It tells us about people who claimed to be "saved," but who are now "against Christ." (This is the meaning of the word "anti-Christ," as used in this passage.)]
- Either way, the changes described in PART 2 are not present in their lives.

Many people don't even know the "basics" of Christianity. Yet Scripture tells us that, if we are truly "born again," we need to be willing to grow up!

- Not only do we need to *know* the "basics," but we need to *move on beyond* them.

So let us stop going over the basics of Christianity again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. (Hebrews 6:1a)
- To make matters worse, many who *do* know the "basics" (or more) don't know how to apply them to their lives. Quite frequently they don't even realize that they are *supposed* to apply Bible truth to their lives!

Beware of a Counterfeit "Salvation"!

The Devil can look like an "angel of light." Scripture warns us that many religious leaders will follow him and will deceive many people into thinking they are "saved," when they actually aren't. See: 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Timothy 3:13.

- Some may tell us we need to have the right beliefs, but they don't tell us about the need to live a holy life (a life separated from sin).
- Some may tell us we need to live the right kind of life, and they fail to tell us that what we believe is just as important.
- Scripture says that *both* truth and actions must go together. It is the person who pays attention to what Scripture says *and* who lives according to it, who will be saved. Matthew 7:24-27.

Many people want to "go to heaven," but they don't care much about living for God. It's just that they don't want to experience the consequences of their sins. **Even in this matter, they love themselves more than they love God!**

- Only those who are Jesus' *friends* and who love him *now* will have the opportunity to live with him for eternity.

The Issue of God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

Many people have a difficult time accepting these two concepts, when it comes to salvation, but *Scripture teaches both*. They go together, like the two sides of one coin. See: John 6:37; Philippians 2:12-13 (note that the phrase "work *out* your salvation," used in some translations, doesn't mean "work *for* it"); Acts 28:26-27 (a prophecy quoted to some people *after* they chose to reject the good news about Jesus).

Even if we find these concepts to be a bit difficult to understand, Scripture clearly teaches us some of the practical consequences of these truths.

- These two concepts will always *work together*. There will *never* be an instance in which someone wants to be saved and God doesn't want him to - John 6:37, 40. (Observation: Passages that mention God's sovereignty in the context of salvation tend to mention it *after* the person has made his choice - perhaps emphasizing *our responsibility* for our choices.)
- God guarantees that, if he has begun a good work in you, he will bring it to completion - Philippians 1:6; 2:13. (You don't have to worry about him quitting on you!) Also, *nobody* will be able to snatch you out of God's hands - John 10:28-29. [Think about it: What does "nobody" mean?]
- It is *impossible* for you to be saved *except* by the way God commands. You cannot choose a different set of beliefs or a different kind of lifestyle, and still get saved. You must come to God on *his* terms and with the right attitude.

Is your "Christianity" - GENUINE or FAKE? (Part 4)

Some Things to Think About

What kind of attitude should you have?

- Luke 18:9-14
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What will happen if you try to get saved a different way?

As far as your *actions* are concerned, you will "reap what you sow."

- Galatians 6:7-10
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- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11
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- Ephesians 5:3-6
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- 1 John 1:6
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As far as your *beliefs* are concerned, if you reject the truth, God may let you be deceived by a lie. You will die in your sins, perhaps totally convinced that you are saved. *And you won't be able to blame anyone but yourself.*

- 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 (an example)
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- Romans 1:21, 28
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Reaching a Conclusion

Think about the things you learned in this study. How are you going to respond to them? If you need to make changes in your life (such as changes in your beliefs or actions), what are those changes, and how (and when) do you plan to start doing them?

What are you *truly* willing to do, to be a *genuine* follower of Jesus? (It's easy to *claim* to have a desire to change, but a genuine disciple will go beyond mere claims.)

- Answering these questions may take some time. You may have a general idea of what you need to do, but determining some of the specific ways you need to apply these issues to your life may take some time. You may have to reflect for a while on what the Bible says; you may have to talk to God (pray) or talk to other people. You may have to do some things differently, deal with past issues and sins, etc.

Is your "Christianity" - GENUINE or FAKE?

(Misc. Comments and the "Signs")

Misc. Comments About this Series

PART 1

Most teens who claim to be "saved," don't believe some of the *most basic* truths about the Bible. For each of the questions on the "true/false quiz," 50 - 70% of teens who *claim* to be "Bible believing Christians" would say that the statements were *FALSE*.

More information about this can be found on Josh McDowell's website, www.beyondbelief.com. He quotes various research statistics. The questions in the quiz are based on the research given in this resource:

Barna Research Group, "Third Millennium Teens" (Ventura, CA: The Barna Research Group Ltd, 1999), pg. 49.

[I am responsible for the wording of the questions given in the quiz, but they are based on the statistical data that is given in the research.]

PART 2

Look up the Scripture passages, or at least part of them. You may wish to make a "hand out" that lists the verses and provides space for writing down what the verses say.

PARTS 3 and 4

These two overlap and you may wish to use them together. (This is how I originally used them.) The first question in Part 4 has a direct connection with the last statement in Part 3.

Part 3 focuses (briefly) on a wide number of issues, but has no "writing assignments." In contrast, Part 4 is mostly *all* "writing assignments" (as well as a challenge to apply to one's life what has been learned).

For Part 3, you should try to read and discuss some of the Scripture passages which are mentioned. You could also look for other verses on the topics, and make a hand-out on a separate page, so that these issues could be explored more in-depth. (Some, but not all, of the issues are included in the "Part 4" hand-out.)

The "Signs"

Below are words for two signs - one claiming to be "genuine" and the other claiming to be a "fake." You can have people hold up the signs, and then ask something like, "Which sign represents what you would expect a "fake" to say?" Almost always, "fakes" claim to be "genuine," and they get offended when someone tries to warn them about what the Bible says.

I AM GENUINE

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I AM CONVINCED THAT I AM
GENUINE

AND

DON'T YOU DARE SUGGEST
THAT I AM NOT GENUINE

I AM

A FAKE