

MORAL IMPROVEMENT OR TOTAL TRANSFORMATION

Men and women need more than just moral improvement. We all need to become more than just nice people. We need to become new people. The Bible says we need to become a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5: 17 says, **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"**

In this study we are trying to explain that being a Christian is more than just being a better person. We want you to be a new person through the righteousness that comes from God through Jesus Christ – Romans 3: 22-26, which says,

"But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."

C. S. Lewis, a famous defender of the Christian faith, said about this:

'Niceness'- wholesome, integrated personality - is an excellent thing. We must try by every medical, educational, economic, and political means in our power, to produce a world where as many people as possible grow up 'nice'; just as we must try to produce a world where all have plenty to eat. But we must not suppose that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice we should have saved their souls. A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world -- and might even be more difficult to save.

For mere improvement is no redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better, but like turning a horse into a winged creature. Of course, once it has got its wings, it will soar over fences which could never have been jumped and thus beat the natural horse at its own game. But there may be a period, while the wings are just beginning to grow, when it cannot do so: and at that stage the lumps on the shoulders -- no one could tell by looking at them that they are going to be wings -- may even give it an awkward appearance. (Page 182 in Mere Christianity, 1960)

We are talking about a new person – a new life in Jesus as Paul talks about in Romans 6: 1-7

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin."

Being a Christian is about salvation in Jesus, a new life, transformation or metamorphosis, (Romans 12: 1, 2), becoming a new creation, accepting the righteousness that God gives, dying to the old self and putting on

the new self, and becoming sons and daughters of God. Paul says in Galatians 3: 26 that we become sons of God through faith and baptism. We cloth ourselves with Christ. This is much more than just becoming a nice or better moral person. **Christianity is not just about stopping certain sins and becoming a better person. It is about realizing you really do need a savior and that you cannot save yourself.** It is realizing that we have a fatal flaw in our character which is called sin, and the only way out is to give our lives to Jesus and let him make us a new person. We cannot do this on our own by our human effort. If we try this way, we will fail over and over. God wants to bring us to a point where we see clearly our helplessness and then come to Jesus, fall on our knees and ask for his help.

Jesus can give us true life. If you believe in him, repent and are baptized, you can have eternal life, forgiveness of your sins, and the power of the Holy Spirit in your heart (Acts 2: 38; John 6: 40). You will cross over into eternal life even while you are still alive in the body (John 5: 24; 1 John 5: 13). Jesus is the bread of life (John 6: 35) and if we give our lives to him, we will be satisfied more than in any other way – whether through money, fame or prestige in this world.

Jesus said, **"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him"** (John 7: 37).

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Matthew 5: 3, 6)

God loves you more than you can think or imagine and he wants you to know that you were made for His glory and to receive glory. You were made to be a child of the king. You were made to be a new person. He wants you to know that you cannot do it on your own, but that with him you can become a child of God and live a victorious, fruitful, purposeful, and meaningful life. He wants to lead you away from half truths and help you embrace the full truth. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life"* (John 14: 6). How could anyone really want anything else? He wants to be sure that you are not settling for the crumbs of this world and wants to feed you with a banquet of food that nourishes the soul. (Note Mark 8: 36 where Jesus said, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?") Jesus wants to give you the water of life that springs up inside of you, refreshes you and gives you internal power beyond what you ever thought possible (John 7: 38).

You were made in God's image (Genesis 1: 27) and you are special to him. You are more than just a number or just someone in the crowd. You are worth more to him than all the things in the world. But do not be deceived because there is an evil one who wants you to think that you are not even worth saving (John 10: 10). But God, in his great love and mercy, made sure that we understood how much he loved us by sending his own son to die for us. John says, **"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins"** (1 John 4: 10).

God wants us to inherit the glory of Jesus because the Bible says, **"Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Romans 8: 17).** (The word "heir" is referring to a person who inherits or is entitled to inherit the rank, title, position, etc. of another.)

True or false questions:

1. Being a follower of Jesus Christ is about just being a nice or better person.
2. I can be good enough on my own to be saved.
3. I can become a new person by giving my life totally to Jesus in faith, repentance and baptism.
4. The most important thing is that we work toward niceness and having a wholesome, integrated personality and to try by every medical, educational, economic, and political means in our power, to produce a world

where as many people as possible grow up 'nice'; just as we must try to produce a world where all have plenty to eat.

5. God wants to bring us to a point where we see clearly our helplessness and then come to Jesus, fall on our knees and ask for his help.
6. We are all made in the image of God and were made to be sons and daughters of God and share in the glory of Jesus with God.
7. We can have eternal life even while we are still in our bodies here on earth.
8. We can get satisfaction here in this life by making a lot of money, being successful in business and having a good family? (Remember Mark 8: 36.)
9. Christianity is about some good principles to live by and making society better.
10. Being a nice person is enough for salvation.
11. Baptism is identifying with Jesus in his death and resurrection and also dying to the old person and being raised to a new life.
12. Words like: transformation, metamorphosis, radical re-orientation, world view change and a new person are good ways to describe what following Jesus is all about.
13. **Discussion question** – When you go back to China what will you tell your friends and family about Christianity? What is it about? What is the core and foundation of Christianity? If it is about more than simply moral improvement, then what is it about? According to the Bible, how do you become a follower of Christ?

Answers to these questions:

1. False. It is about transformation, metamorphosis, radical repentance, becoming a new person – a child of God.
2. False. The Bible says all have sinned and fallen short of God's grace. So, we cannot save ourselves. We need the righteousness that comes from the cross of Jesus Christ.
3. True. However, it is also important that one continues to grow in holiness becoming more like Jesus day by day.
4. False. Even though these things are very important, they do not bring redemption. The Bible says that even if we gain the whole world and yet lose our souls, it is of no benefit. We need more than physical health and a good education. We need transformation in the inner most part of our hearts. We need a savior and this is Jesus Christ.
5. True. If we never see our helplessness, we will not come to Jesus. We need him more than we can imagine. The Bible says that without Jesus we can do nothing.
6. True. We were made to be sons and daughters of King Jesus and share in his glory.
7. True. John says to the Christians in 1 John 5: 13, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."
8. False. Even if you are the richest person in the world, you will still not be happy until you know Jesus. There will always be an emptiness in your heart until you accept the salvation Jesus offers you.
9. False. Christianity is about resurrection, transformation, loving God with all your heart and loving others with the strength that comes from loving God. It is more than just living by some good principles. Many religions have some good principles, but Christianity is about giving your whole being – your life, soul, mind, heart, and body to Jesus in total faith and trust. It is also about being saved by grace instead of your own goodness or ability to follow good principles.
10. False. You can be a nice person and still have hate, anger, lust, or evil thoughts in your heart. The only thing that can save you is when you give your whole self to Jesus in repentance, confession of him as Lord, and baptism. Then you go forward and live a radically devoted life to him seeking his guidance every day, even being willing to go through persecution for the name of Jesus.

11. True. Baptism is more than just a ritual; it is dying to your old way of thinking and giving your heart, mind and soul to Jesus. It is like you are bringing his death into your soul and becoming one with him on the cross. Then as you come up out of the water it is like you are becoming one with him in his resurrection. You have been raised to live a new life and walk in this resurrection life every day. It is also a reminder that one day you will rise from literal death to live with him forever.

12. True. Becoming a follower of Jesus is like being born again and becoming a new person. You have the same body and same basic personality, but when you give your life to Jesus, he changes everything.

13. The core of Christianity is the Christ event which includes his life, death, resurrection and return. The resurrection of Jesus tells us that we will also be raised and his death shows us we have a savior who will forgive us of our sins and give us strength to go through persecutions. His return tells us there is a goal to the Christian life and that we need to be ready when he comes. Grace is also at the core of Christianity. You are saved by grace not by your own goodness. If you want to become a follower of Christ, you need to understand that you are a sinner and have fallen short of the perfection of God. You need a savior. Then you need to repent or, in other words, confess your sins and re-orient your mind and heart toward God. You need to change your world view and begin to ask, "What is God's will for my life." Then you need to confess and believe in Jesus, his death and resurrection, and accept him as Savior, Son of God, and master and ruler of your life. You need to then be baptized into Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and to receive the Holy Spirit. Then you need to go forward trusting God, serving Him and others, and sharing the good news of Jesus with others. God wants to bless you so you can become a blessing to others. May God open your hearts and minds to the truth of these matters. May He fill you with the fruit of righteousness.