

Chapter 1: Summary

Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship – a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus never established a religion with a set of rules about how to worship Him. The early church met in homes. Only later were church buildings and denominational rules, regulations and rituals established (see Chapter 8: The Traditions of Men).

- The Bible says that *“pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”* (James 1:27)
- It also says that *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”* (Micah 6:8)

Many Christian leaders (e.g. Billy Graham) believe that many, if not most, of so-called (nominal) Christians are not actually “saved.” Some estimated go as high as 90%. Studies have shown that only 3-5% of individuals who “give their hearts to Christ” and say the “sinner’s prayer” at evangelism rallies remain in church 2 years after their supposed conversion.

- This is because most Christians do not know what it really means to be “saved” or “born again.” (see Chapter 4). And even when they go to church, most do not hear the unmitigated, uncompromised truth as presented in the Bible.

Theologians have largely muddied the waters of understanding by engaging in trivial disputes and endless nit-picking arguments, seeing the individual trees, and not the whole forest. Thus we have many denominations that emphasize differences over the essential elements of true Christianity.

- It is said, and I believe it to be largely true, that many people who go off to seminaries to become ministers are filled with faith, but are lacking knowledge – and they come out full of knowledge but lacking in faith

God loves diversity. After all, He created the world with tremendous diversity in the plant and animal kingdoms. However, He is not the author of division – that is Satan’s job (see Chapter 5)

- Christians are called to be “in unity and one accord” with one another. Jesus last prayer recorded in John 17 contains His plea that we *“all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”* (John 17:21)
- However, unity is not uniformity. We can agree on the essentials and yet worship differently (e.g. hymns vs. modern choruses). However, we are not supposed to isolate ourselves within denominational walls that divide Christians from one another.

I do not have the audacity to say that only I know the truth, or that I am better than anyone else. But what I have had the audacity to do is to believe what the Bible actually says. Now that gets us into an area called “Fundamentalism” which is discussed in full in the next chapter.

- But for the purposes of introductory premises, we need to understand the difference between literalism and inerrancy. There are many statements in the Bible, Jesus’ parables for example, that cannot be taken at face value. They are setting forth a principle.
- So true fundamentalism is not taking every sentence literally, but rather understanding the principles which are “inerrant” or without error. Where some see inconsistencies in the Bible, these always come from a lack of understanding of Scripture as a whole. The only errors are in our interpretations.
- The Bible is the foundation of Christian faith and practice. If it’s not in the Bible, we need to question whether it fulfills any of these principles or not. Much of what passes for Christian religion are man-made inventions having nothing to do with being a follower of Christ.

True Christianity is the only “religion” that fully explains every question we have about our existence, such as: “Why are we here?” “Why is the world the way it is?” “Has God abandoned us?” “How can God “be love” when He allows so many bad things to happen to us?” (see Chapter 1)

- When Jesus and the Bible refer to the “Church” (with a capital “C”) they are not referring to denominations or buildings, but rather the entire body of born-again believers. Anytime believers gather anywhere to worship and grow in Christ together, they are having Church
 - However, believers ought not isolate themselves from the Body of Christ, because we cannot fully stand and grow on our own, which is why the Bible tells us to not forsake “*the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another.*” (Hebrews 10:25)

Furthermore, the Bible call upon each individual believer to have a personal relationship with Jesus. There are not supposed to be any “gatekeepers” (e.g. priests, rituals, churches) between us and our Lord (master) and Savior.

- For example, forgiveness comes when believers confess and repent of their sins directly to God (see 1John 1:9). Rituals and/or priests were never intended to be the purveyors of God’s forgiveness.

Another concept we must understand from the beginning is the principle of interpreting individual verses within the context of the entire body of scripture. Out of my own journey of faith when I was an ardent New-Ager, I once wrote in my book “Ultimate Reality” that when Jesus said we must be “born again” he was referring to reincarnation.

- Now that I have read the entire Bible (many times) I see how ridiculous this is (we explore the “born again” mystery in Chapter 4).

My background is Lutheran (child), Pentecostal, a “New-Ager” most of my adult life, and now a truly “born-again” non-denominational Christian. As a result, I have seen and experienced many diverse sides of what purports to be Christianity (see Appendix A: Author’s Background).

- As the Prayer Coordinator for Yavapai County, Arizona, I have had to really study and seek the Lord to find the essential elements of our faith in which all Christians can (and should) come together in unity
 - As always, balance and moderation (one of the fruits of the Spirit) are in order
 - Radical Christianity is nothing more than believing fully and doing what the Bible says

One consistent principle in Scripture is that God uses the “foolish things to confound the wise” – e.g. the disciples were largely uneducated, common laborers

- Very seldom does God choose the powerful, prestigious or knowledgeable people to fulfill His plans -- He does this so that He gets all the credit
 - A personal example: I used to be an executive in the computer software industry and came to the ministry late in life, ordained by Pastors Bud & Betty Miller of Christ Unlimited Ministries. I was “online” since the mid-80s, and yet God chose Bud & Betty to start up the Bible.com Internet ministry (now one of the largest Christian web sites in the world) when they didn’t know the first thing about the Internet, while He chose me to embark into ministries in which they were very experienced and I was not.

Another key point in understanding Scripture is that such knowledge is a “heart thing” (see Chapter 9)

- Every Scriptural reference to obtaining knowledge refers to the heart, not the mind (e.g. “meditate on the Word of God and write it on the tablet of your heart”).
 - In the original Greek of the New Testament this is called “epignosis” (heart knowledge) vs. “gnosis” (mind knowledge)
 - Thus, Scripture is best interpreted by a “born again” heart that is filled with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, who is the “Spirit of Truth” and our “Teacher”

Christianity in the Post-Modern World

Resistance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ has calcified and stultified in the “post-modern” Western world. Either there is an “I’ve heard it all before” closed mindset or there is an immediate, angry response. The anti-Christ spirit has never had more of a stranglehold that it has now.

- Note: The “post-modern” Western world includes the so-called developed, industrialized, first-world nations. The following remarks do not pertain to the largely un-Christianized third-world, lesser-developed, “10-40” window nations and cultures where salvations and miracles are on the rise.

So what are we to do? We must be ready with a pre-emptive answer to the known, major concerns of unbelievers in today’s world, which are:

- Christianity is just one of many roads that lead to Heaven
- We all pray to the same god (even President Bush has stated this)
- Christians are hypocritical, negative, unforgiving, unloving and unlovable people
- Christianity itself is fragmented into so many denominations each claiming the “truth” that how are we to know what the truth is? If, indeed, there is any absolute truth
- The Bible was written by men, not by God
- If God is a loving God, why did He create such a mess here on earth? Or, why doesn’t He do something about it if He is all-powerful?
- Anger at God for trials and tribulations – either for causing them or allowing them to happen even when we prayed to Him for relief and deliverance

Also part of our culture today is the “sound-bite” fast-food mentality. People’s attention spans have shrunk to less than 30 seconds. If you don’t strike a chord in that time, forget about it.

So here are some initial “quick” answers that address the above needs. If that opens a door, then we can go ahead into a slightly deeper explanation, like peeling an onion, one layer at a time.

1. What is Christianity? Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship with Jesus Christ.
2. What is the Church? The church is not a building or a denomination, it is any time, any place believers gather together in the name of Jesus Christ
 - The Greek word for “church” is “ekklesia” which literally means “called out ones”
3. We all pray to the same god, don’t we? Absolutely not. There is only one True God who can save us from this hell on earth. While there are many other religions, there is but one Creator. It stands to reason that there would only be one true religion. Human beings and Satan concoct the others.
4. Isn’t that intolerant? You bet it is. Salvation and eternal life are exclusively available through only one door, Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for our sins.
5. You Christians are so high and mighty, so hypocritical!! We are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God, so you can’t judge God’s character and nature through imperfect human beings.
6. How can we believe in some ancient book written by fallible men? The Bible was inspired by God’s Holy Spirit, and is an amazingly coherent tapestry that holds together beautifully even though it was written over thousands of years by ordinary human beings. Many archaeological finds support the information in the Bible.
7. If the Bible is the basis for Christianity, why are there so many denominations? God is perfect, we are not. It is our interpretations that differ. There are no inconsistencies in the Bible. It is inerrant (but not literal).
8. So why did God choose the Jews and not others? God didn’t choose one group over another, He created a new group through one man, Abraham, and one woman, Sarah.

9. If God is “all love” why does He allow so much evil and tragedy in the world? God is separated from this world by our sinfulness. Satan is the god of this age according to the Bible. But God loved us so much, that He sacrificed His only Son to pay the penalty for our sins and offer us a free, undeserved ticket to Heaven and eternal life.
10. If God is so all-powerful, why doesn't He just get rid of the devil and all evil? God created human beings with free will. Therefore, He must offer us a choice between good and evil, God and Satan. Otherwise, He would have created robots. He desires us to love Him and fellowship with him of our own free will. He will never violate our free will.
11. But God caused (or allowed) me to be abused (hurt, injured, etc.) even when I prayed to Him for help! In this fallen world, the rain falls on the just and the unjust. God does not wish to see us hurt, nor does He cause evil things to happen to us – especially if perpetrated by others as an act of their own free will. It is the devil who comes to steal, kill and destroy. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and so that we might have abundant life. We are hurt by people exercising their free will, not by God.