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Eternity: Smoking or Non-Smoking?

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When asked, "Are you a Christian?" most Americans will say, "Yes." According to statistics, most Americans believe in God and think they will go to Heaven when they die. However, the Bible says, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

Why do so many people think that they are Christians if they are not? A false Christian is deceived by what seems logical to him. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Prov. 14:12). In order to determine whether you will spend the after life in the "smoking or non-smoking" realm of eternity, consider the differences in a false Christian and a true Christian.

A False Christian

Believes in God - Simply believing in God does not make you a Christian. Satan himself, along with all the demons of Hell, believes in God. James says, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder" (James 2:19). The difference between a false Christian and a true Christian is that a true Christian doesn't just believe in God, he *knows* God personally. In order to truly know someone, we must spend time with that person. If you have no desire to spend time with God through prayer and learn more about Him through reading His Word, you should consider whether you really *know* Him.

Believes in Self - Some people think they are Christians because they strive to live a moral life. They assess themselves as "good" in comparison to others. Based on their good deeds, they believe they have earned the right to enter Heaven. The Bible teaches that our good deeds will not purchase our ticket to Heaven: "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). If we could receive salvation by being a good person, then God sent His Son to die for no reason. To say that you are good enough to enter Heaven on your own is to reject the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Believes in Religion - Being a Christian is not about a *religion*, it's about a *relationship*. Salvation is not found in attending church three out of four Sunday services a month. Salvation is not found in your denominational preference. Salvation is found in the person of Jesus Christ. Going to church, wiping noses in the church nursery, and teaching a Sunday school class does not win you brownie points in the Lamb's Book of Life. The Lord condemned the "religious" leaders and all their religious rituals when He said, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Isa. 29:13). Jesus described such people as those who washed the outside of the cup while the inside was still unclean (Matt. 23:25). God is concerned with your heart, not with your outward religion.

Believes in Unconditioned Mercy - I wish I had a quarter for every time I have heard, "God is too good to send me to hell. His mercy will prevail." It is true that God is merciful, but He is also perfectly just. He is too holy to just "write off" our sin; the penalty must be paid. For those who *accept* his son, God's justice falls on Jesus, and they receive mercy. But for those who *reject* his Son, God's justice falls on them. Jesus explains it this way: "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in Heaven. But whoever disowns me before

men, I will disown him before my Father in Heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33).

God's justice and mercy find their ultimate expression on the cross, where Jesus died as an atonement for our sins. By pouring out his wrath on Jesus, He pours out His mercy on those who believe. But those who reject His mercy by rejecting His Son will most definitely suffer His wrath. Jesus said, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only son" (John 3:18).

A True Christian

Becoming a Christian is as simple as receiving a gift. In fact, salvation is a free gift. We cannot earn it. We cannot buy it. Jesus bought it for us with His own blood. He paid our debt in full so that we do not have to pay it ourselves. Paul says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life" (Rom. 6:23). In other words, the "wages," or consequence, of our sins is death. The Bible defines eternal death as being separated from God (see Matt. 7:23). A true Christian:

Believes He is a Sinner - "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Sin is what separates us from God. Sin is simply breaking God's law, His commandments, such as lying. We have all broken God's law. Therefore, we are all sinners.

Believes Jesus Christ Died for Him - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). There is no greater love than the love that Jesus has for you. It wasn't the nails that held Him to the cross that day, but His love for you. He suffered and died in order that you might have life abundantly.

Because God is holy, He cannot tolerate sin. In fact, He said that all sin must be punished by death. In all fairness, we should each pay for our own sins. But God, out of His love for us, paid the price when He sent Jesus to die on the cross. God called this Christ's "atonement," or payment, for our sins.

Believes Salvation is Only Through Jesus Christ - Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is the one and only provision for our sinfulness. In order for us to be forgiven, there has to be atonement for our sins. Jesus is our atonement. He died so that we might live. He paid the price so that we do not have to: "For Christ died for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

Believes in God's Promise - "Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). God's Word is holy and true. If you acknowledge yourself as a sinner, if you believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, if you repent of your sins and invite Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, you will be saved. Jesus promised, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in" (Rev. 3:20). Will you let Jesus in?

Becoming a Christian

If you would like to accept Jesus as your Savior, receive God's forgiveness, and have the assurance of eternal life with Him in Heaven, I invite you to speak to God with this prayer:

Dear Father in Heaven, I acknowledge that I am a sinner in need of your mercy, forgiveness, and grace. I believe that Jesus died for me, paying the price for my sins. I believe Jesus rose from the dead, conquering death in order for me to live eternally. I am sorry for my sins against you. Please forgive me. Please wash away my sins with the precious blood you shed for me. I invite you to come into my life and reign as my Lord and Savior. Help me to know you. Help me to obey you. Thank you, Jesus, for saving me and for giving me new life in you. Amen.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Rom. 10:13)



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