

Summary

Becoming a Christian initiates transformative changes which are too easily overlooked: forgiveness, peace with God, new citizenship, the Holy Spirit’s indwelling, altered destiny, adoption as God’s child, family in Christ, new creation, sanctification, and enduring challenges—all evidencing God’s work.

Prayer

Dear Father,

Your loving acceptance, gentleness, correction and guidance are a wonder to me, your child. Forgive my laziness and self interest. Stir me with a desire for holiness and usefulness for the sake of your, indeed our, kingdom.

And may this time of worship and hearing be a hallowed hour, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Hymn: *by C Wesley*

1. What shall I do, my God to love, my loving God to praise!
The **length**, and **breadth**, and **height** to prove and **depth** of sovereign grace?
2. Thy sovereign grace **to all extends**, immense and unconfined;
From age to age it never ends, it reaches all mankind.
3. Throughout the world its **breadth** is known, wide as infinity,
So wide it never passed by one; or it had passed by me.
4. My trespass was **grown up to Heaven**; But far above the skies,
In Christ abundantly forgiven, I see Thy mercies rise!
5. The **depth** of all-redeeming love, what angel-tongue can tell?
O may I to the utmost prove the gift unspeakable!
6. Come quickly, then, my Lord, and take possession of Thine own;
My longing heart vouchsafe [*graciously permit*] to make thine everlasting throne.

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Scripture

- Colossians 1:10-14
- John 14:15-21

Message “The Christian. What’s Different?”

There is great variety in the circumstances surrounding people who get to the point where they were able to say of Jesus Christ “My Lord and my God”. Maybe it was a commitment to Christ that seemed to have always been there, or there was a dramatic and sudden change of mind that is associated with date and time, or maybe it was a long and possibly difficult emotional and mental journey over several years, unable to pinpoint a specific time when “it” happened. Whatever the circumstances and time frame, it is worth reminding ourselves of some of the changes that take place when a person submits to the rule and care of the One who lives and reigns forever. So here’s a list,

The Christian – What’s Different?

undoubtedly incomplete, but indicative of the comprehensive nature of the transformation that takes place in the life of a Christian, and I trust has taken place in your life.

1. For many, the first and foremost was and is the forgiveness of sin. All sin forgiven is the status of the Christian – your status. The assurance that one’s sin is completely forgiven, no exceptions, is central to the gospel. Jesus said so. Actually, what he said was “repent (for the Kingdom of God is at hand)”¹, but he wouldn’t have said that unless there was corresponding forgiveness. The Christian is completely forgiven by God.
2. As a consequence, peace was established between you and God. Previously because of sin you were exposed to His wrath. Now there is instead a covenant of peace between God and you, made permanent through the blood of the eternal covenant². As the Scriptures tell us “He has broken the dividing wall of hostility, so making peace, reconciling us to God through the cross.”³
3. A citizenship ceremony took place. Everybody has dual citizenship: a national citizenship and a spiritual citizenship. Our national citizenship would be citizen of Australia, just like Paul was a Roman citizen, which he sometimes took advantage of. But everybody also has a spiritual citizenship. You were by nature a citizen of what Scripture calls “the kingdom of darkness”. As Bob Dillon sang “You gonna have to serve somebody.”⁴ But you were transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved Son, as the Scriptures tells us⁵. Or to put it another way “your citizenship is in heaven”⁶. And again: “you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God”⁷. So you have a new home, and it’s called heaven, or the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of his beloved son.
4. God, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, moved into your life. Jesus put it this way: “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”⁸ This is astonishing. When you decided to submit to the living God he came and made his home with you. “I will come to you” Jesus said. “I will not leave you” he said. “I will give you the Counsellor to be with you forever” he said. “The Spirit of truth lives with you and will be in you” he said. “You are in me and I am in you”⁹ he said. To put it another way, you became the temple of God. It’s true that corporately we as the church are that temple, but it also applied to you personally. “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you”¹⁰ the Scriptures tell us.
5. When you became a Christian, your destination changed. Israel Folau got into trouble for quoting 1 Corinthians 6:9 which spells out who will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

¹ Matthew 4:17

² Hebrews 13:21, also Luke 22:20 “the new covenant in my blood”

³ Ephesians 2:14

⁴ “Slow Train Coming” Bob Dillon

⁵ Colossians 1:13

⁶ Philippians 3:20

⁷ Ephesians 2:19

⁸ John 14:23

⁹ John 14:15-21

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:19

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Of course what his critics failed to appreciate was the first half of that same verse that says “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God”. And who is unrighteous? We are told elsewhere that “None is righteous, no, not one.”¹¹ So what does that tell us? It tells us that no one will inherit the Kingdom of God, or to put it another way, every person’s destination is hell. The good news is it doesn’t have to be and when you became a Christian it changed. Your destination was no longer hell but heaven. In fact, as we noted already, you are there now because you are a citizen.

6. Another thing that changed when you became a Christian was your relationship with God. Yes, God forgave you, and yes you are a citizen of his kingdom, but your relationship with him changed as well. God is no longer just ‘God’! You were adopted by him and became a much-loved child of his. This God from whom you were estranged, became your Father. In a conversation between a nurse and a nine year old patient in the WCH (Adelaide) in 2022, the nurse said “I would believe in God if I knew he was good”. Without hesitation the nine year old replied “Oh he is good. He is very good”.¹² Your God is very good, and very kind, and very affectionate. He became and remains your Father.
7. This adoption process meant that when you became a Christian you immediately became a member of his family. When it became widely known that the journalist Malcolm Muggeridge had become a Christian, he was astonished to experience a “surprising sense of kinship with fellow Christians wherever he travelled.” “This unity in Christ, which transcended borders and cultures, deeply impressed Muggeridge, affirming for him the universal and unifying nature of Christian fellowship.”¹³ They were fellow Christians with a common Father, members of the same family. God places the new Christian into his family. And God’s family crosses all boundaries, including time, and includes all those who have put their trust in him, whenever and wherever. You became a member of his family.
8. You became what the Scriptures call a “new creation”. We are told “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”¹⁴ This meant that pretty much everything changed. The parameters to assess right and wrong changed. Your assessment of what was more important and less important changed. Priorities changed. Your conscience was re-awakened. The Bible became interesting. Your worldview changed because everything was and is viewed from a different perspective. Much of what the world has to offer all of a sudden looked very shallow and of little consequence. Your tastes and personal desires changed. Personal behaviour was impacted, perhaps dramatically, as you operated within a new paradigm with new boundaries. You became a new creation. The term “born again”¹⁵ became an apt description of the changes that took place.
9. As a new Christian there began a new journey with a new Friend in Jesus Christ, with new hope, a reinvigorated love for God and life. You attended church, perhaps a bit

¹¹ Romans 3:10

¹² You can read more of this nine year old’s story on the HopeNet SA website [here](#)

¹³ Conversion: A Spiritual Journey by Malcolm Muggeridge and comment from ChatGPT

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁵ John 3:3

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nervously at first, and there found new friends. You began a process of personal change and adjustment, as the Scripture says, to “present yourself holy and blameless and above reproach before the living God”¹⁶, a process called sanctification.

10. Finally it also needs to be said that when you became a Christian, new difficulties arose. The nature of those difficulties vary a lot according to circumstance. Some who were close to you could not agree with your change in your life. Some friends were lost, some relationships became difficult. Maybe you could no longer participate in certain activities, whether of a private nature with others, or in your work, which resulted in you being ridiculed or mocked and laughed at. For some it has meant being cast out of family or even sent away from your home town. Maybe there was a financial cost as you addressed matters that had been left untouched. Some Christians have said they only experienced problems in life after they became a Christian. But you took comfort that Jesus predicted exactly that. “In the world you will have trouble” he said, “but take heart; I have overcome the world.”¹⁷

So there is a list of events and circumstances that took place when you decided to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, when you became a Christian. Note they are mostly things that God did. You could probably add to that list, but there is nothing else in an individual’s life that can compare with the change that takes place when becoming a Christian. And as I heard one person say, you will never regret it.

Prayers for suffering Christians: *from Barnabas Prayer for 17/11/24*

Lord Jesus, we intercede for Your Church in Saudi Arabia and praise You for our faithful brothers and sisters who follow You in this heartland of Islam. We pray that You will light their paths and grant them discernment in an environment where leaving the majority religion is punishable by death.

Thank You that You are the vine in whom we remain. Please enable Your branches in Saudi Arabia to remain firm in You and live fruitful lives amid the surrounding darkness, for we ask in Your precious Name. (John 15:5)

HYMN: *by C Wesley*

1. This, this is the God we adore; our faithful, unchangeable friend;
whose love is as great as his power, and neither knows measures nor end.
- 2 'Tis Jesus the first and the last whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
we'll praise him for all that is past, and trust him for all that's to come.

Benediction:

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA

¹⁶ Colossians 1:22

¹⁷ John 16:33