

Christianity FAQ: Five Questions Students Ask

Honest answers about rituals, life after death, baptism, church, and how to begin

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

AT A GLANCE

BIG IDEA	Christianity is not a set of rituals that earn God's approval. It is a relationship with Jesus, who saves us by grace. Everything else, from baptism to going to church, flows out of that.
SCRIPTURE	Ephesians 2:8-10 · James 1:27 · 2 Corinthians 5:8 · Luke 16:19-31 · Revelation 20-21 · Luke 23:39-43 · Acts 10:44-48 · Hebrews 10:24-25 · Ephesians 4:11-13
LENGTH	About 25 minutes, or one question per week as a series
BEST FOR	Middle school and high school; especially good when students bring friends who don't go to church
YOU WILL NEED	Bibles and index cards for students to write their own questions

Start here: no question is off limits

Students who are new to church, and plenty who grew up in it, have real questions about what Christians believe. Asking isn't a lack of faith. Peter told believers to "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). Here are five of the questions students ask most.

1 How do you "practice" Christianity? What are the required rituals?

Short answer: there aren't any rituals that save you. Many religions are built around things you must do to earn favor with God: prayers at certain times, ceremonies, rules, sacrifices. Christianity starts at the other end. A person is saved by what *Jesus* did when He died for our sins and rose again, not by anything we do.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." **EPHESIANS 2:8-9**

Does that mean Christians just do whatever they want? No. The very next verse says we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Christians follow Jesus by obeying what He taught, but that obedience is the *result* of being saved, not the cause. It's what saved people do. James describes it simply: caring for people in need and keeping yourself unstained by the world (James 1:27).

2 What happens after you die? Can you ever get out of hell?

For those who believe in Jesus: when a believer dies, their spirit and soul go to be with the Lord. Paul says to be "absent from the body" is to be "present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Jesus promised the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Believers worship God in His presence until the resurrection. Then they receive new, immortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-54) and will live and serve God forever in "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1; see also 2 Peter 3:10-13).

For those who do not believe in Jesus: whether they followed another religion or no religion, their spirit and soul go to a place of waiting and separation, often called Hades or hell. Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus describes it as a place of torment (Luke 16:23). At the final judgment, they will be raised and judged, and those whose names are not in the Book of Life will be "cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). Jesus called it "outer darkness" (Matthew 25:30), a place of conscious, lonely suffering forever.

Can anyone get out? The Bible gives no hope of escape after death. In Jesus' story, Abraham says, "between us and you there is a great gulf fixed" (Luke 16:26). That is exactly why the decision we make about Jesus in this life matters so much, and why God is patient, "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

FOR THE LEADER

This question can stir real fear or grief, especially for students who have lost someone. Answer truthfully, but gently. Remind them that only God knows a person's heart, and keep pointing to His love and patience. Make yourself available afterward for anyone who wants to talk.

3 If you don't get baptized, do you go to hell?

No. Baptism is not a requirement to be saved. It is the natural, joyful response of someone who already is saved, a public way of saying, "I've chosen to follow the way of Jesus."

Two examples make this clear. The thief on the cross was never baptized, yet Jesus promised him Paradise (Luke 23:43). And in Acts 10, the people in Cornelius's house received the Holy Spirit *before* they were baptized (Acts 10:44-48). They were baptized because they were already saved.

So is baptism optional? Not for someone who wants to obey Jesus. He told His followers to make disciples, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Baptism pictures what happened when you trusted Christ: your old life was buried with Him, and you were raised to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). If you have trusted Jesus and haven't been baptized, talk to a pastor about it.

4 If I read the Bible and follow Jesus, do I still have to go to church?

Yes. Not because church attendance saves you, but because following Jesus means doing what He designed. Jesus gave the church leaders, "evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints... till we all come... to a perfect man" (Ephesians 4:11-13). Paul told Timothy to pass the faith on to faithful people "who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

We need each other. Hebrews says, "let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:24-25). A coal pulled out of the fire goes cold fast. If you truly follow Jesus, you will want to meet with His people to learn, grow, worship, and serve.

5 So how does someone become a Christian?

If salvation isn't earned by rituals, how do you receive it? The Bible makes it simple:

- **Admit** that you have sinned and can't save yourself (Romans 3:23).
- **Believe** that Jesus died for your sins and that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9).
- **Receive** Him. Ask Him to forgive you and make Him the Lord and leader of your life. "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

Then begin following Him: read His Word, pray, get baptized, and connect with His people.

TALK IT OVER

1. Why do you think so many religions are built around things people must do to earn God's favor? How is Christianity different?
2. If good works don't save us, why do they still matter?
3. How would you explain to a friend why baptism matters even though it doesn't save us?
4. What do you gain from church that you can't get from reading the Bible alone?
5. What other questions about Christianity do you or your friends have? (Write them on a card for next week.)

TAKE IT HOME

Choose one of these five questions and practice explaining the answer in your own words, in under one minute. Then ask God for an opportunity to share it with a friend this week. If you have never received Jesus yourself, don't leave without talking to a leader.

Saved by grace, through faith, for good works.

From fifty years of youth ministry by **Ron Whittam**. Share freely with your students and leaders. · The Youth Ministry Living Room · qrprogramming.com/livingroom

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.