

[Almost or Altogether? \[1\]](#)

by: [E. S. Gutwein](#) [2]

One day, many years ago, a well-known Christian leader was arrested and brought before the king for telling his own people that they must repent, turn to Christ, and live their lives in victory over sin. After explaining that the prophets and Moses actually spoke of Christ's suffering and resurrection, this Christian leader asked the king, "Do you believe the prophets?" He then answered his own question by saying, "I know that you believe."

The king replied, "Almost you persuade me to be a Christian."

Then, with great eloquence, the apostle Paul responded to King Agrippa.

"I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds" (Act 26:29).

This passage helps us realize that we cannot just be "almost" Christians, "almost" persuaded, "almost" converted. We must be "altogether" Christians. Christ Himself said, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Mat 7:14). A chick halfway out of the egg is not a fully-born chick; likewise, a person halfway through The Door is not a completely "born-again" Christian. (Joh 10:9)

Good intentions are a good start, but are not enough to bring forgiveness and freedom from sin. Sadly, many in this world follow their own religion with good intentions, but unless they pass through the "Strait Gate", and walk the "Narrow Way", they will not get to Heaven (Joh 14:6).

You may dress modestly; you may be honest in your business dealings; you may be a good son, daughter, husband, or wife; you may even obey most New Testament commands; but if you have not repented of ALL your sins, and asked Christ to cleanse you, give you a new heart (Eze 11:19, 36:26) and change you, none of your good deeds, though they are a necessary part of the Christian life, will buy you a ticket to Heaven. (Rom 9:11, 32; Gal 2:16, 3:10; Eph 2:9; & Tit 3:5).

"Ye must be born again," said Jesus. (Joh 3:3, 7). The sinful nature with which we were all born must be rooted out by Christ and replaced with His new nature.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2Co 5:17).

A good Christian heritage is a wonderful thing to have, but it is not enough to justify us before a holy God. A godly heritage is an introduction to the Christian life, but if we do not have a personal change of heart, the outward appearance only makes us "almost" Christians. We cannot be saved by the faith of our fathers and mothers. Biblical faith must become our own faith!

Baptism, though an integral part of the beginning Christian, has no virtue of its own to a

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person who comes with good intentions only – unchanged, unrepentant, unconverted – with a faith other than his own, or just because others his age are getting baptized. Baptism by itself, does not make a person an “altogether” Christian. It is only for those who have sold themselves out to Christ in true repentance and are committed to living a life of obedience to Him.

However, make no mistake; we cannot reject baptism either. Jesus said that for Himself to be baptized was the fulfillment of all righteousness (Mat 3:15). He, as our perfect example and as the author and finisher of our faith, gave us this practice to follow.

Furthermore, the Scriptures tell us to “repent and be baptized for the remission of sins”, “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”, and other similar Biblical mandates. Therefore, while a person who gets baptized without conversion is an “almost” Christian, the same would also be true for those who refuse to be baptized after confessing and repenting from their sins.

The Bible prescribes some general principles concerning our dress. The Christian should be dressed like a Christian, not like the world. However, dressing right does not make you a Christian any more than putting on wings would make you an angel. Dressing right is an expression of a right heart, but does not make your heart right. Scripture does not lay down a certain pattern or style of clothing for the Christian, but has principles for us to follow. Therefore, do not think that your outward appearance will clean up the mess you have inside.

“Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Mat 23:26).

Our heart is like the source of a fountain. When we realize we have said something nasty, we know that something nasty went into our heart first. For example, James 3:10 says that it is not fitting for our mouths to give forth both blessing and cursing at the same time, because “doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?”

When our lives are revealing rebellion to God through our practices, our dress, our music, etc., the Bible says that something went wrong in our hearts first. “An evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil” (Luk 6:45). Do not believe the lie that you can be an “altogether” Christian, claiming your heart is right, while still doing that which is evil.

How to become an “altogether” Christian

The Bible says that God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to save whosoever believes on Him (Joh 3:16). This means that God “first loved us” (1Jo 4:19), and “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). He made the first move; now what will you do in response?

Ephesians 2 says that we are “by nature the children of wrath.” We are born with a sinful nature because the first man took on a sinful nature through disobedience, and that makes us enemies of God, who is holy. Furthermore, because we are born with a sinful nature, we are bent on rebelling against God’s commands, even if we were born into a Christian family and were “good” children. We are still sinners before God.

Although children are safe from God’s wrath, they still start responding with sinful behavior at

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a young age, and express the impulses of a sinful nature years before the age of accountability. Then when we arrive at an age that we start to understand our sinful condition before a holy God, we begin to be accountable for our sin and are no longer safe from God's wrath. The time has come to confess that we are a sinner by nature and that we have committed sins against God. We need a change of heart and a new nature. We do not want to experience God's wrath in the lake of fire someday.

When we come to the time of this understanding in our lives, we have two choices: accept it and repent, or reject it and go on in rebellion. We may excuse ourselves by saying we have good intentions or that we have been raised in a godly home. But we know that this only makes us "almost" Christians. To be "altogether" Christians we must "repent and be converted, that [our] sins may be blotted out" (Act 3:19). We must enter the Kingdom of God through the Door, lest we are condemned for trying to break in and enter some other way. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber" (Joh 10:1). We need to repent and believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior and as the ONLY way to God.

Good works before conversion do not save us; good works after conversion are our duty. The sinner's prayer, as some call it, is an important beginning, but it does not end there. The Bible says that we are saved "not of works", but "unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:8-9, 10). First, we need to "put off concerning the former conversation (way of life) the old man, which is corrupt". We must be "renewed in the spirit of [our] mind, and [we must] put on the new man, which after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:22-24).

Good works for the born-again believer are a natural expression of their new life in Jesus Christ. They are an expression of obedience to our Lord and Savior, for He has commanded us to live holy lives (1Pe 1:15), to depart from sin (2Ti 2:19), to help those in need (Gal 6:10), to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb 10:25), to cover our heads (for the women; 1Co 11:6), to not cover our heads (for the men; 1Co 11:7), to be chaste (Tit 2:5), to use our gifts for the edifying of the church (Eph 4:12), and many other commands about life. When we do good works before we are born again, we do it with our own power, but after we are saved, we should be doing them through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Being saved is not an end in itself either. God saves us so He can have a relationship with us and walk with us, as it were, "in the cool of the day", just like God and Adam in the Garden of Eden. Take time each day to speak with God in prayer and to read His Word. An "altogether" Christian develops a relationship with his Savior and loves to spend time with Him. If the Christian does not develop and maintain a personal relationship with the Lord, he may well be one of those to hear the words "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mat 7:23).

And finally, it is very important for us to find other Christians, who have Biblical convictions, to regularly meet with (Heb 10:25) for fellowship, exhortation, encouragement, and guidance (Rom 12:4-8; Heb 3:13, and 13:17; plus all the "one-anothering" passages, Gal 6:2; Jam 5:16, 1Th 5:12, etc).

While the Bible teaches that it is necessary to be an active, blended part of a local body which teaches and lives out the Bible, there are some situations where this may not be possible, due to circumstances beyond personal control. However, our God is longsuffering, gracious, and

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full of mercy, therefore, He understands when an individual has their heart turned towards Him and is trying to serve Him to the best of their ability in the midst of their situation. If believers find themselves in a less-than-ideal situation and seek God's leading, He will provide for them in His perfect will and timing.

Conclusion

When I open a door, and take one step into a house, remaining with one foot outside and one foot inside, am I in or am I out? I could say I am almost in; however, I am also almost out! The Bible teaches that if you are "almost" a Christian, you are still outside the Door.

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luk 13:24).

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