

## **Navigating Christianity**

It is almost easier for someone unfamiliar with Christianity to understand it clearly as opposed to someone raised in one of the many different Christian traditions or denominations. Many raised in a particular tradition will not question if it is right and may actually seek to push their views on others. This should not happen.

*Rom 14:5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.*

As one can see from the religious wars of the 17th century in Europe, Christians can get very angry with each other. Perhaps this is the greatest failing of Christianity, to integrate itself with government and military. There can be short term advantages for Christian leaders who endorse or align themselves with the powerful of the world. However, this is not what should be done.

*Jas 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

## **Basic Christianity**

It might be best to start with an understanding of basic Christianity.

*1Co 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;*

*1Co 15:2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.*

*1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;*

*1Co 15:4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*

It is simply trusting in this gospel (good news) that makes someone a Christian. Various denominations have added criteria such as baptism, church membership, saying a special prayer, or making Jesus lord of your life. However, these are not in the bible. Some will argue that they can find places in the bible that appear to support their additions, but these are usually out of context.

There is simple biblical proof that being a Christian is just a matter of having faith (trust).

*Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

*Eph 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

## **Christian Maturity**

One might well ask if Christianity is so simple and straightforward, why are there so many differences and contentions. The answer is simply, immaturity. Christians are expected to grow into Christ-likeness.

*Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*

*Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

*Eph 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:*

In his first letter to the Corinthian church Paul addresses many of the problems the new believers were having. One problem was carnality (indulging the flesh) he called immaturity.

*1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*

*1Co 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.*

*1Co 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?*

In this particular instance their immaturity had resulted in what might be called denominations.

*1Co 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?*

Most Christians today are unaware that they are supposed to mature at all much less know how to do it. Paul describes this transformation as putting off the “old man” and putting on the “new man”

*Eph 4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;*

*Eph 4:23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;*

*Eph 4:24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

This putting on and putting off can seem almost abstract or even mystical. Especially when described in part as walking by the Spirit.

*Gal 5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*

The disengagement from the flesh can seem even more distant from real life.

*Rom 13:14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

*Rom 8:13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*

Mortify (put to death) the flesh sounds drastic. However, it might be more useful to think of letting the desires of the flesh simply die of starvation as a result of making no provision for them. It might help to see what the bible describes as works of the flesh;

*Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,*

*Gal 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,*

*Gal 5:21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

When one looks at this list it is easy to see why these qualities should be gotten rid of. Some in Christian circles call them sin, which is not inaccurate. However, the idea of sin is often more limited in scope to law breaking and most people do not consider themselves to be law breakers.

If one considers that we are all born helpless, ignorant, and selfish, one might see in the list of the works of the flesh the common denominator of selfishness. It is difficult for people not to see some benefit in a degree of selfishness as it can achieve pleasant sensations, material accumulation and even wealth, social prominence, and power. However, it is our desire to pursue our own path away from God that brought this world of suffering on our own heads.

Most Christians are unaware that we are supposed to give up selfishness.

*2Co 5:15 And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*

The biblical definition of love seems to be summed up as selflessness;

*1Co 13:4 Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,*

*1Co 13:5 doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil;*

*1Co 13:6 rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth;*

*1Co 13:7 beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

One might see in the natural order of life that the typical selfishness of childhood is diminished when one becomes a parent because one is forced to surrender some selfishness to accommodate the needs of a child. As one grows into old age, self-seeking is further reduced as one becomes increasingly limited in what one can do.

A writer commenting on the collaborative writing process observed that if each person thinks he is the one doing 80% of the work and is OK with it, the collaboration will work. The same might be seen in marriage.

## **Additional Problems**

One might think that ignorance, laziness, and selfishness would be enough to cripple Christianity but there is an agent with supernatural, but limited powers that seeks to further harm Christians. The very idea of Satan seems to stretch credulity. People often ask that if God is all powerful, why would he allow someone like Satan to operate at all. The answer might be that he serves a useful purpose even in his rebellion.

We are told that he sets the course of the world and that we are not unaware of his actions.

*Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:*

*2Co 2:11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

Paul writes Timothy an interesting bit of advice in regard to those who are contentious.

*2Ti 2:23 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.*

*2Ti 2:24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,*

*2Ti 2:25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;*

*2Ti 2:26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.*

It is mentioned that there will be those who are in a “snare” of the devil. These stir up strife. They may become free through repentance that can acknowledge truth. One might conclude that there are snares available to trap Christians. These may be vulnerable to being taken captive due to their immaturity of walking in the flesh. Truth seems to be a key component both in its lack when taken captive and in its presence when getting free. For this reason one might view truth as critical both to Christian maturity as well as the discernment to avoid “snares”.

## **The Importance of Truth to Navigation**

A compass is essential to a ship attempting to navigate unfamiliar waters. Similarly truth is essential in attempting to avoid snares that can retard maturity. The bible gives an illustration of how people can use truth.

*Act 17:10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.*

*Act 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

In Berea there were those who used the bible to determine what was true. However, there are many who use the bible or a verse from the bible to hide a snare. A key point here is questioning. This is a tool useful in testing what is assumed or what one is presented with.

To consider an example of how truth can be applied through questioning we can consider a common question such as how can God be just placing in eternal torment those who simply have not believed in Jesus. This doctrine is almost universally presented as truth. However, one can discover biblical elements that cast doubt on the doctrine of eternal conscious torment.

The unsaved are said to be perishing.

Revelation refers to a second “death”.

The bible says that eternal life is a gift (presumably not given to everyone).

The word translated eternal is aion in the Greek and means “age”.

Is the punishment or the punishing “eternal”.

What was incomplete in the death of Christ that requires further payment by others?

It is such questions that can be useful in trying to determine the truthfulness of a particular doctrine or assertion. It is by means of such questioning that one comes to their own faith as opposed to trusting in the faith of someone else, who might be mistaken.

It is important to differentiate certain truth from that which is uncertain. That Jesus died for our sins and we can have eternal life with him by trusting in what he did for us can be established from the bible with a fair degree of certainty. A doctrine like the trinity may be more difficult to establish with much certainty. There are three persons described in such a way as to infer divinity. However, how this works would require us to have more of a celestial organizational chart than we can get from the bible as well as the ability to understand it.

The bible says that there are things the angels desire to look into. A serious bible student also recognizes things that he would like to know more about. There will be things we do not know or completely understand. Seeking truth can keep us from the trap of declaring speculation as certainty.

Perhaps the biggest hindrance to truth is pride and wanting to feel good. If we can see ourselves in truth and can see God in truth, we can only come to humility. If we do not have real humility, it may indicate we are lacking in truth.

### **What to do with Israel?**

Quite a number of Christian traditions become invested in wrong doctrine because they have made an error regarding the status of Israel. Some think the church today has replaced Israel and all the promises made to Israel are for us today. Others claim that we have inherited what was for Israel because we are now “spiritual Israel. Still others say that the time of Israel ended and the church is the way God is reaching the world (some even claim that the world will be made perfect by the church and the Jesus will return to rule). A few even claim that Christians are to follow the law for Israel and adopt Jewish practices.

The bible is divided into the Old Testament (covenant or contract) and the New Testament. The first covenant was between God and the nation of Israel made at Mt. Sinai. The old Testament is pretty much a record of how Israel broke that agreement. It took the 70 years of Babylonian

captivity to stop the nation from practicing idolatry. Israel was promised a new covenant that was anticipated as a sort of Eden on earth that the people of Israel would be given,

Many Christian denominations consider that Jesus (described in the gospels, the first four books of the New Testament) brought the new covenant that was established with the church and continues to today. At the meal he had with his disciples the day before he was killed, he said that the cup of wine was representative of his blood that would be shed to pay for sins.

*Mat 26:28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

Jesus came to offer himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. However, his offer was also for the nation of Israel to bring them their promised earthly kingdom. Like the first covenant, the new one with Israel would require the nation to agree. While some did accept Jesus, the leaders and most of the nation did not. What would have happened if the nation of Israel had accepted Jesus as king was that a time called “Jacob’s trouble” or “tribulation” would have occurred for seven years and the Jesus would have returned to establish his kingdom for the faithful remnant of Israel. Because this did not happen then, the events described in Revelation will happen in the future.

While the probability that Israel would receive the king (Jesus) and kingdom were diminishing, a Pharisee called Saul (Paul) was called to primarily be an apostle (messenger) to the gentiles (non-Jews). His letters are also included in the New Testament. These letters are what should be guiding Christians today. Sadly, most of Christianity tries in various ways to make what Jesus told Israel and what Paul wrote gentiles both apply to us today. The mistake is failing to differentiate what is said to whom and why.

In talking about eternal life with a young a rich Jew (for the Jews eternal life would be available to those who were faithful to the end of their life and they would be resurrected unto eternal life) Jesus said that he had to keep the law. However Paul wrote gentiles that they were not to keep the law.

*Luk 18:18 And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*

*Luk 18:19 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.*

*Luk 18:20 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.*

*Luk 18:21 And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up.*

*Gal 3:1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?*

*Gal 3:2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*

*Gal 3:3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?*

It is fairly obvious that what is being said to one group is different than what is being said to another. The reason for this is that there were two gospels. The nation of Israel had a national gospel of the kingdom for them and the gentiles had an individual gospel of grace for them.

*Gal 2:7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter;*

While both gospels at the core had faith in Jesus (being the Messiah for Israel) (paying for sins by his death burial and resurrection for gentiles), there were significant differences. Jews had to keep the law and their salvation would come at their resurrection. Gentiles would receive eternal life upon trusting in Jesus. While not being required to keep the law, it was expected that as Christians matured, their selfless love would more than fulfill what the law required anyway.

*Rom 13:10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

## **Common Problems with Christianity**

### **Water Baptism**

Water baptism is practiced in different ways in Christianity. Some baptize infants and others only upon a profession of faith. Some feel this is a sacrament that dispenses grace and causes someone to become saved. Others see baptism as a public profession or testimony. Many take the words of Peter to support their practice.

*Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

When the English bible was written the practice of infant baptism was so well established the translators went with a transliteration of the Greek “baptizo” rather than translate the word more accurately as “immerse” as immersion could be dangerous for infants.

The problem here for Christians is that water baptism would be expected for those of Israel who were to become a nation of priests. Additionally repentance which is often taken to mean “feel bad” actually means to change one’s mind in Greek. Those of Israel were encouraged to see things correctly and recognize that Jesus was the Messiah, which they had just done in the previous verse;

*Act 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

*Act 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

In contrast, Paul declared that even though he had baptized a couple of people, he had not been sent to baptize because he was sent to the gentiles;

*1Co 1:17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.*

It can be very difficult for someone raised in a denomination that has a particular ritual to question if it is true or effective. Such questioning is almost considered heresy and can trigger intense opposition. Of such divisions families have been torn asunder. For the Christian considering water baptism, he may wish to consider that for Christians there is only one “baptism” (immersion) that of being immersed into the body of Christ.

*Eph 4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;  
Eph 4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,*

*Gal 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

## **Calvinism**

There are a number of problems that one trying to navigate Christianity can encounter. one is called Calvinism (named for a theologian in Europe about 500 years ago). This can overlap with what is called reformed theology and covenant theology. The idea is that no one can become a Christian unless God specifically chooses them. In addition, there is a diminishment of the idea of free will, this also promotes the idea that everything that happens to someone (good or bad) is because God ordained it.

While seeming to hold God in high regard, a diminished view of free will actually tends to make God responsible for evil. It can make people inactive as they are waiting on God to act in their lives. It can also lead people to assign to God whatever happens in their lives as good or bad in terms of what is comfortable or adverse. This tends to focus on self and comfort.

There can be a problem with pride that results from a view that one had been specifically chosen by God to be one of the elect. This is likely to occur if one sees in election and predestination an individual selection rather than the establishment of a category that one would be in as a result of having faith.

The catchy acronym of TULIP is often used to describe the Calvinist doctrine;

T = total depravity. This seems an excessive description of someone otherwise good who simply has no interest in God. It is defined as no human ever being able to be saved unless God firsts injects them with the ability to do so. Jesus said that those who were of the truth would hear his voice. To which the Calvinist would declare that only God can make someone “of the truth”.

U = unconditional election. Even though the bible declares that salvation is by faith, the Calvinist will assert that it is God that give you the faith to be saved.

L = limited atonement. This assertion is made to say that the death of Christ on the cross was only for those who were elect. The declaration of John that Christ dies for the sins of the whole world seems to make this point difficult to defend.



I = irresistible grace. This is taken to mean that even someone hostile to Christianity could not stop himself from becoming a Christian if God had elected him. This suggests a universe where we are only the robot-like result of a God that controls everything.

P = perseverance of the saints. This means that each Christian will live their lives to be concluded successfully is salvation. The implication here is if someone falters it is only because God wanted it that way or the person was never really elect to begin with.

It can be attractive to think that we have no responsibility in life and everything is determined by God. However, one should ask if this were true, why are there so many admonitions, exhortations, and appeals that we act and do one thing or another. It would seem that there are almost constant appeals for us to exercise our free will.

### **Charismatic Christianity**

The word charismatic comes from the Greek word often translated as “gift”. What are called gifts of the holy Spirit are described in Romans and 1 Corinthians.

*1Co 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

*1Co 12:8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;*

*1Co 12:9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;*

*1Co 12:10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:*

That these gifts were intended to simply jump start the early church when they had no bible and needed to prove that the gospel was true as well as have a “taste” of the power of the age to come might be seen in the following verses;

*1Co 13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.*

*1Co 13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*

*Heb 6:5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,*

The popularity of superhero movies testify to the hunger people can have to be special and powerful. However, many are frustrated in these circles with not actually being able to manifest these “gifts”. The excuses of a “prayer language” that no one knows or obscure citation of miraculous events from far away locations often makes people skeptical that the bible is true at all.

### **Word of Faith Christianity**

There are a number of branches of Christianity that promise health, wealth, and prosperity in proportion of faith. This is a magnet for those who desire a sort of magical improvement of their

life circumstances. By making use of some of the promises God gave to Israel those that promote these doctrines manage to fleece the gullible while blaming them for not having enough faith to get what they want.

Interestingly these practitioners parallel what the priests of Pagan religions used to do. In ancient Egypt or Greece, you could have a cushy job telling people the future the gods had in store. If things actually turned out bad, the priest would blame the people for having done something to upset the gods.

## **Contemporary Church Services**

Often in a contemporary church service you find self-stimulating songs that emphasize how people can make themselves feel. Swaying back and forth as well as raising hands often help people feel they are spiritual. Often these songs are called 7-11 hymns because it can seem that the same seven words are repeated eleven times.

One can appreciate the attraction especially if one has come out of a ritualized church service tradition. The ability to have ones feelings stimulated can provide an experience that seems to verify that one is experiencing something more “spiritual”.

That this is self-stimulation should be seen as a warning sign. Other forms of self-stimulation such as alcohol, drugs, and masturbation are not typically done in a religious venue. We live in a consumer society where seeking things that produce pleasant sensations is routine. However, the proper place for feelings is an effect of something else. If sought directly there is always the possibility it can become addictive like other self-stimulation.

To assume that the pleasant sensations are a result from closeness to God is almost to make God a sort of drug dealer. The indulging of self is the opposite of being close to God.

## *Ritualized Christianity*

This represents many of the traditional denominations like Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran. These are often populated with a declining number of elderly members. One Lutheran pastor had observed that they lost 80% of their youth after college.

*Mar 7:7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

One problem of Christian practice is trying to run it as an organizational machine. It can efficiently process components, but it falls short in the relationships that are supposed to define Christianity. Systems do not do relationships.

These Christian traditions may remain faithful to the practices of previous generations, however, that does not mean that they were “On track” to begin with. There is little individual growth and as long as the denominational criteria has been met, there is every expectation of having a ticket for heaven.

## **Politicized Christianity**

While Christians are not supposed to be entangled with the world, some have used Christianity as a platform to plunge into patriotic political conservatism or woke liberalism. It is rather strange that the object of the entanglement does not seem to matter. The appeal of self-righteousness should not be underestimated. Those in this snare might be identified by the contempt they have for others.

*Luk 18:9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:*

## **Christian Cults**

There are religious organizations that claim Christianity but whose organizational systems, doctrines, and practices mark them as more cultish. The Mormons, Christian Scientists, Seventh Day Adventist, and Jehovah Witnesses can all be said to occupy the fringe of the Christian world.

Like gnosticism and the ancient Pagan mystery religions they all offer a sort of “secret” knowledge that gives them an appeal to those who want to feel as if they are in the know with the inside story. In a way, these can often have a stronger faith than those in more mainstream Christianity. It is almost as if feeling ostracized gives a degree of strength.

## **Tithing**

The practice of giving one tenth of your money to a church is embraced by many churches. It was originally established for Israel because the tribe of Levi was to be priests and were not available to farm land. The practice is continued today because many feel that this requirement was not limited to Israel as well as being a convenient way to raise money.

For Christians Paul describes an individual decision in regard to giving and not what an organization requires.

*2Co 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*

The New Testament records collections being made for the Jewish believers in Jerusalem who were running out of funds while they were waiting for the rest of the nation to receive Jesus. There are also references to churches that met in people’s homes. Common church practice today is to buy real estate and construct and maintain buildings and hire staff to administer an organizational system that seems only distantly related to what the early Christians did.

## **Anemic Relationships**

Christians should think of themselves as “family”. However, our understanding of family has been so much changed over the last 100 years that it may not be that helpful in understanding what that meant. In a world where you lived and died where you were born. You knew everyone and they knew you intimately. The fact that as soon as individual mobility was available with the automobile, there was a mass migration to cities and suburbia indicates how difficult close relationships can be.

We are told to love one another often because we are so un-loveable. It is only when we mature enough that the selfishness of the flesh diminishes to the point where we can tolerate each other that real Christian fellowship can emerge. The mechanical nature of most modern churches helps people avoid each other so that our immaturity is not so much revealed in conflict with each other.

Sadly, this accommodation of our immaturity removes some of the incentive we might have to mature. Maturity would not only help solve the problem of weak or non-existent fellowship with other Christians, it might also help with anemic relationships within our own families.

Relationships consume time, require forbearance, and are killed by selfishness. After the flood God gave us shorter lifespans, susceptibility to disease, and a harsh environment as a way to force us to need each other and to consider our relationship with him more than those before the flood whose every imagination of their heart was only evil continuously. As life has gotten easier since the Industrial Revolution, our tolerance for God and each other has gotten less.

## **Denominations**

Most denominations distinguish themselves by their doctrine and rituals. The doctrine is presented as a sort of package that defines their brand. There is an implication that they are the ones who got it “right”. This tends to be written in stone that requires acceptance. Unfortunately this approach is static and does not accommodate the questioning and learning approach (dynamic) that is necessary for personal growth and maturity.

The focus of a denomination is often brand consistency such that every church of that brand is operated identically. Often denominations maintain their own seminaries where young men who want to be pastors get trained. The word pastor (meaning shepherd) or pastors occurs only once in the New Testament and is grammatically joined to the word teacher so that the idea is conveyed of shepherding accomplished by teaching. This usually results in pastors giving a Sunday morning lecture called a sermon because this is the way they were instructed (by lectures) in seminary.

Some denominations are closer to truth than others. However, most suffer from the systems approach to Christianity. The apprentice or mentorship approach is not often encountered because there is a risk that some instruction might be outside the control of the pastor. Pastors often see their job in terms of controlling the information put forth to prevent error.

## **The Unsnared Christian Life**

These are just a few of the ways Christians can get diverted into snares. The key to getting out of a snare is a change of mind leading to truth. Jesus told those that believed on him that truth would set them free;

*Joh 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;*

*Joh 8:32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

While Jesus was speaking to those Jews who believed on him, there is application for us today as well. Jesus is truth and his words are truth and if we continue in truth, we can be free. Christians have available to them wisdom, truth, discernment, and the opportunity to be free from the debilitating effects of the flesh. Most churches are failures when it comes to helping their members even know this, much less helping them achieve it.

Since the Christian life is supposed to be about learning and growing, it would not be surprising that we take a wrong turn or two and even encounter an occasional snare. Consider the saying, "I am embarrassed by what I thought five years ago and hope to be embarrassed five years from now by what I think today".

A young man in a juvenile detention bible study once asked, "What church should I go to?" It was sad because there was not a single church that could be recommended for him. He was told that almost any church he would go to would take one look at him and he would be sent to a youth group. He would have pizza and go bowling and ask himself, "What has this to do with Jesus?" which would be a very good question. The young man was told to go to a Christian church and pick up whatever nugget or two of truth he might find, but to keep an eye out for an older and wiser Christian who clearly showed the light and love of Jesus and ask that person if he could teach you to know Jesus as well as he seems to.

The path to grow in the Christian life is most often traveled by what could be called "self-starters" Those seeking truth and answers to question show a hunger for that which is spiritually satisfying. These are those who are not satisfied with contrived assertions or convenient or plausible "answers" that are only provided to deflect inquiry. One has to be careful not to appear hostile or be identified as a "trouble maker" by their inquiry.

The Internet is an advantageous way to sift through a lot of information without triggering anyone's outrage. Sadly, there is so much wrong and useless that it can seem impossible, but at this point in history, the odds of encountering someone we can learn from or even someone seeking to learn is becoming increasingly rare.

At it's most basic level Christianity is simply about faith (trust). We can demonstrate trust when we sit in a chair, we assume it will hold our weight and not collapse us to the floor. One becomes a Christian by trusting in what Jesus did on the cross to pay for our sins. This trusts consists of several elements;

1. Believing there is a God.
2. Believing that Jesus is God's son.
3. Believing that our sinful nature keeps us from eternal life.
4. Believing that Jesus's death burial and resurrection pays for the sins we have committed.

Once a person has faith, the holy Spirit places him in what is called "the body of Christ". This is a way that we are in Christ and he is in us. This is a sort of spiritual bridge that keeps us ever with Jesus. This is not readily apparent at first as our old fleshly nature can make it seem that we have not been made a Christian and it may not seem so to others.

With maturity our lives begin to transition from selfishness to the selfless love of Christ. We face many challenges that can stall us from making much progress. However, it is growing in discerning truth that can help us overcome snares, wrong turns, and even laziness.