

Top Ten Reasons to Be a Christian • 1 Peter 1:8-9

David Letterman is famous for his Top Ten Lists on The Late Show. They are a humorous way to quickly say ten things about one topic.

No doubt you have heard lists of ten or more reasons not to be a Christian. They include other religions, hypocrites in the church, alleged contradictions in the Bible and plain old apathy. I'm convinced that there are very good responses to those who argue against Christian faith and commitment. The problem is that we can give so much time and effort to answering the critics and cynics that we never get around to telling the good news of Christian faith and life.

Today is not about answering the negatives but stating some of the positives. Actually, the list is too long for our limited time, so we'll take ten, ten top reasons for being a Christian.

Reason #1 is that Christianity is true. What the Bible says about God, Jesus, sin, faith, the human condition, eternal life, heaven and hell are all true. The Bible is, by far, the best attested historical document of the ancient world. Two thousand years of scholarship have tested and accredited biblical claims. The Bible has been reviewed, analyzed and critiqued by historians, scientists, archaeologists, philosophers and theologians.

Christianity tells the truth that God created the world, that human beings sinned, that God cared and that Jesus came to earth, lived a perfect life, died on the cross to pay for our sin, rose from the dead and offers to us eternal life. If Christianity isn't true then nothing else on the list much matters. But it is true. The Bible is right. Jesus said it well, claiming to be "*the way, the truth and the life*" in John 14:6.

Reason #2 is that we are all sinners. The Bible teaches that every one of us is a sinner. In Romans 3:23 we see that "*all have sinned*" and in Romans 3:10 we read, "*There is no one righteous, not even one.*" This is not to say that people don't do good things. The reality is that most people do good things on a frequent basis. But it is to say that every part of us is corrupted by sin and distanced from God. Sin is like a terminal virus that has contaminated every

organ of our bodies. Therefore, we have a systemic illness. We are still alive and walking but we have a serious problem. Without outside help we are goners.

When we are honest with ourselves we all acknowledge that we are sinners. It is one of the reasons we cover up to make ourselves look good. If we weren't sinners we would never be embarrassed or ashamed by any of our thoughts or our actions. There would be no problem showing on public screens all our thoughts, words and deeds over the past 30 days.

Do you remember the true story of the Apollo mission to the moon chronicled in the movie starring Tom Hanks? When they realized that the space ship had been severely damaged and they did not have enough oxygen to get back to earth, Tom Hanks' character radioed back to NASA the most memorable line of the film: "Houston, we have a problem!"

We humans have a problem. We're headed to eternity and we don't have enough good in us to get to God. We are going to die forever if we don't get some help. So our famous line is, "God, we have a problem." We don't want to die forever. We aren't interested in hell. We want God to save us as much as the astronauts wanted Houston to save them. That's a very good reason to become a Christian because Christians get to exhale sin and breathe in the life-saving righteousness of Jesus Christ.

So, we're sinners. We have a problem. Becoming a Christian solves that sin problem.

Reason #3 is that Christianity works. There are a billion testimonials to the effectiveness of faith in Jesus Christ.

Three out of four weekends at Wooddale Church we hear a FaithStory of exactly how Christian faith worked in the life of someone from Wooddale Church. For more than 25 years I have been listening to these stories (and I usually get to read them in advance as well as hear them multiple times on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings) and I am totally impressed with the astonishing variety of these autobiographies: Young children; people in their 90s;

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married and single; different races, ethnic and language backgrounds; celebrities and ordinary folk; those who are terrifically successful and others who have had a lifetime of problems and failures. Some believed easily with young faith and others have searched and studied for decades. Their stories are laced with sickness, healing, life and death issues, accidents, murders, abortions, assaults, depression, prosperity, poverty and just about every other human experience. They all come around to the same conclusion—Christianity works. God met their need. Jesus chased them down. Their lives were saved. Their needs were met.

This is no theoretical religion or abstract philosophy. Becoming a Christian makes a huge difference in people's lives. It saves people from sin, meets them in their need and transforms their lives. In a huge understatement, "becoming a Christian is a really good deal."

Reason #4 is that God loves us. Of course, this is why God sent his Son to die on the cross for us. *There would be no Christianity if God didn't love us.* Romans 5:6-8 says:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

It is indescribably spectacular that God loved us enough to give his Son for us. But reason number four is pretty powerful all by itself. To be loved by God is amazing.

Sometimes we hear stories about rich, powerful, famous people who are totally mean to ordinary people. On television ads and in public appearances they seem nice enough but the real person is overbearing, unkind, arrogant and demeaning. I won't list the names of some famous people who have recently had their darker side revealed by court documents or "tell all" biographies, but you can probably guess.

The point here is that God is nothing like that. Although, he could be! God could blow us away and never give us another thought. It's not like he needs us or that we have anything to offer him in return. To the contrary, we humans are notorious for the bad ways we treat God and the frequency with

which we swear with his name. God is the biggest celebrity of all. He is an infinite trillion times richer than everyone else put together. God is all-important. He doesn't need us. Yet, he loves us. God loves you more than your mom ever loved you. God loves you more than you love your best friend. God is the ultimate lover. He treats us with dignity and respect. He is always there for us.

When someone loves me, I like them. When someone loves me I want to love them back, vote for them and send cards and thank you notes to them. When someone loves me I want to play on their team, work for their company and be their friend.

God loves you and God loves me. That is a very good reason to be a Christian!

Reason #5 is forgiveness. We all need to be forgiven. That's because we are all sinners.

St. Paul was so keenly aware of his sins and mistakes that he described himself as the worst of sinners. While it is difficult for me to think of St. Paul as worse than Hitler or Stalin, that's the way he saw himself. Sensing his sin, he was hungry for forgiveness and delighted in the mercy God showed. That is why he wrote in 1 Timothy 1:15-16:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Years ago I tried to help some people who were caught in a very difficult situation. By the time I became aware of what had happened, there was significant fear piling up. I tried my best to help them. I tried my very best, but clearly I did not meet their expectations and they were disappointed with me. I hurt for them. In time it actually worked out amazingly well, but I vividly recall a conversation that took place when the crisis was at its peak. They were so angry over what had happened. I told them I was sorry. I apologized for not helping them more. They turned on me and said words I have remembered. They told me they were offended that I had not handled their situation better and that they would "never forgive" me for failing them.

To "never be forgiven" is to forever carry a burden of blame and guilt. I can hardly imagine what it

would be like to be told that by God. What if God assessed every sin I ever committed, every mistake I ever made and everything I failed to do that I should have done? What if God looked me in the eye and said, “I will never forgive you!”? The burden of guilt would crush all the happiness out of life. The sense of failure would destroy any hope I could ever have.

But God is just the opposite. Whatever we have done that we shouldn’t have done, whatever we should have done that we didn’t do, God forgives. God lets us off the hook. Jesus even forgave those who crucified him while he was being crucified. The burden of guilt is lifted and life is changed.

That kind of forgiveness lifts us to the heights of exhilaration. It sets us free from guilt. Our burden of failure is lifted and our sins are forgiven. Forgiveness and freedom from guilt is clearly one of the very best reasons for being a Christian.

Reason #6 is heaven. It may be the number one reason on many lists. That is because just about everyone I know wants life after death. No one wants to go to hell. Going to heaven is such a pervasive desire that the least religious people talk as if it is guaranteed. Rock stars die of overdoses and their friends say they have gone to the “Big Pot Party in the Sky.” Total strangers talk about a neighbor dying and say, “He’s better off in heaven.” Those involved in Holy Wars and suicide bombers die convinced that they are headed to heaven.

What is different about Christianity is the guarantee and credibility. Jesus once lived in heaven. Jesus came to earth, lived a perfect life, died, came back to life again and went back to heaven. So he knows. He’s been there. He has firsthand experience. Christianity isn’t about wishful thinking or wild speculation. It is a promise. Jesus said in John 14:1-3:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

So, become a Christian and this life leads to heaven. Forever alive with God! The best of the best! No more pain, no more disease, no more unemployment or tears or death. It is paradise! It is one of the very top reasons to become a Christian.

Reason #7 is help for living right now. The benefits of being a Christian don’t begin when we die. They begin right now. Being a Christian is not the spiritual equivalent of a pre-paid funeral plan where you don’t get the benefits until you die. Being a Christian makes a difference now as well as forever.

On February 16, 2004, ABC’s Diane Sawyer interviewed Mel Gibson on PrimeTime Live. Most of the interview focused on his film “The Passion of the Christ.” After dealing with the controversies that were swirling around the film’s opening, the interview turned personal. Gibson admitted that he produced the film as a believer, as one whose life had been radically altered by Jesus Christ. At one point Gibson said, “I have to believe.” That seemed to confuse Diane Sawyer and she said, “You *have* to believe?” He answered, “I have to . . .” “Why?” she asked. “So I can hope. So I can live.”

Mel Gibson is not a trained theologian, but he tapped into a profound biblical truth. Belief in Jesus not only gives us hope for eternity but help to live today.

The biblical expression “eternal life” isn’t quite what it seems when translated into English. It sounds to us like it is most about quantity of life when it is really most about quality of life. First written in Greek, the expression literally means “life of the ages” or “life of eternity.” The point is that we get the life of God here and now. Without Jesus Christ we are stuck with earth life. With Jesus Christ we begin God-life. It is true that it lasts forever, but the greatest reality is that we get the life of eternity starting right away.

The difference is obvious to see. Those who are Christians have a better life. Christians have God helping them through their best and their worst of days. We aren’t on our own. God helps Christians all the time.

The benefits of being a Christian don’t begin when we die. They begin right now.

Reason #8 is fellowship. Christians belong to the family of God. We are part of the church of Jesus Christ. We are never alone. Others share our values, care about our needs, become our friends and stand by us.

Not all Christians take advantage of this divine benefit, but those who do are richly rewarded. It is the supernatural combination of being on a team, belonging to a family, joining a club, sharing a vision, experiencing community and never ever being alone.

I can tell you from personal experience that I have met people around the world who seem to have very little in common with me. We have different first languages, different nationalities, difference race, different gender, different socio-economic status and a thousand other differences but we share a bond in Jesus Christ that makes us part of the same eternal family. It is a very good reason to be a follower of Jesus.

Reason #9 is the Holy Spirit. Every Christian, at the moment of becoming a Christian, has the Holy Spirit move into his or her body.

The goal of most religions of the world throughout history has been to connect with God. People work, pray, make sacrifices and hope for a personal connection with God. Christians have God come to us! We are told in 1 Corinthians 6:19 that the Spirit of God moves into our bodies. We become the temple/home of the Spirit of God.

You've seen signs on hotels or restaurants that say "Under New Management". They signal that a new day has arrived and someone better, smarter and more creative is now in charge. When we become a Christian it is as if we have a banner across our bodies saying "Under New Management". God himself has moved in to manage our lives. God-in-us helping, protecting, giving wisdom and making us into all God wants us to be.

Reason #10 is others. Let me explain. When we become Christians we touch the lives of others for good. We become better children, parents, husbands, wives, friends, employees and neighbors. Christian faith transforms communities, unites families and improves our world.

I remember walking through slums outside of New Delhi, India. A man with whom we were walking who lived nearby said, "You can tell which houses belong to Christians." When I asked how that was possible he replied, "When someone be-

comes a Christian it changes their home. They clean it up. Their children even look different because of the transformation that takes place."

So, we played a game. As we walked along, I would pick out the houses or the children I thought were from Christian homes. Then we would knock on the door, they would invite us in and we would see. And they were Christians! Because, when you become a Christian everything changes. It becomes obvious to others around you.

One of the most frequent reports I hear when someone becomes a Christian is that "someone was praying for me for years." Faith touches others. When you become a believer it is an answer to your mother's prayers. When you become a believer, you delight your spouse's heart. When you become a Christian, you make a difference in the lives of other people.

That's only ten reasons. There could be ten thousand more.

Maybe you saw the movie "Air Force One" starring Harrison Ford as the President of the United States. The President's Boeing 747 is hijacked in flight by terrorists. The President is a former soldier who fights back. Eventually there is no crew and the plane is going down. Only the President and one terrorist are left.

To rescue the President a zip-line is connected to the 747 in an attempt to move the President along the wire into a smaller plane. Radio contact is lost. Officials are horrified as the radar shows the 747 go down.

Finally, there is radio contact from the smaller plane to the war room at the White House. The pilot says, "Liberty 2-4 is changing call signs. Liberty 2-4 is now Air Force One." It is the presence of the President that makes the plane Air Force One.

When we believe in Jesus Christ, we change our call signal. Whatever our names, we become Christians. It is the presence of Jesus Christ himself in our lives that makes us Christians!

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