



*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me."
John 14:6, NIV*

For just a moment we need to step off the court and use a timeout. Timeouts are called at strategically important points in the game or when something significant needs to be communicated to the team. Sometimes the coach has to deliver some hard truth which is uncomfortable to hear but it's necessary. This is one of those times. However, before you can hear the truth, you need to know what's not true so you can recognize and distinguish the truth from the lies. I'm talking about the lies circulating throughout the world with respect to how you can become a Christian.

Jesus clearly tells us there is *only one way* to God, the Father. In John 14:6 Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." One way. JESUS. But despite that simple, powerful truth, mankind is misguided everyday by false beliefs leading them to the conclusion that salvation (deliverance from sin and its consequences) can be achieved through multiple means. According to the Bible, that is far from the truth! John 8:44 tells us that Satan is a liar and he wants to create confusion about how we come to Christ. He'll use any means necessary to keep us from the truth, including religious beliefs that are *almost true*. Listed below are common lies that the world accepts as truth, deceiving many people into believing they are Christians.

- ***I'm a good person.*** Being a good person *does not* make you a Christian nor does doing good works. After all, how much good is good enough? Ephesians 2:8-9 makes this very clear. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (ESV). While good works cannot earn you salvation, they are still important and should accompany your faith. What good is it if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (Jas. 2:14, 17).
- ***I was born a Christian.*** For many people around the world, religion is part of their heritage. You can be born Jewish, Muslim or Hindu, but you *cannot* be born Christian. In John 3:3, Jesus said to Nicodemus, a very religious man, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he will not see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus was baffled at this weird statement, just like you or I would have been, so he asked, "How can someone be born when they are old? Surely they cannot enter their mother's womb a second time to be born." Jesus wasn't talking about a physical rebirth. He was talking about a "spiritual

birth.” Have you ever heard the phrase, “Born again Christian”? It refers to a change of heart—the new life a person finds when he or she repents of their sins and turns to Christ for salvation. As a result, they become a child of God.

Many NBA greats such as Dwight Howard, Jeremy Lin, Dwyane Wade, Kevin Durant, Nate Robinson and Steph Curry boldly profess to be born again believers. And that’s just to name a few.

- ***We are all children of God.*** I suppose most people think this is a true statement but the fact is, it’s not. All humans are God’s creation and we belong to him because he formed us and created us in his image. But there’s a huge difference between being God’s creation and God’s children. As a human being, you were born into a family and nothing can ever change that. But when you invite Jesus into your heart, you are spiritually reborn into another family—the family of God. When Jesus was in the world, many didn’t recognize him for who he was—the Christ. We are told that even his own people rejected him. “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). God doesn’t depend on us to be his children but he wants us to be. He doesn’t force himself on us; he lets us choose. God chose you from the beginning of time because he loves you desperately.

When Steph Curry was in fourth grade, he *chose* to give his life to Jesus and went from being God’s creation to a child of God. In a Fellowship of Christian Athletes article, Curry wrote, “I’m proud to be a child of God. It’s in His name that we play and go out and perform and compete and using the gifts He has given us in the right way.”

- ***Baptism saved me.*** All scripture says that people are saved by simple faith in Christ without any act of righteousness, including baptism. Baptism is never mentioned as part of the plan of salvation but was something that accompanied a person’s faith in Jesus Christ.

Numerous scriptures support the fact that people believed first and then were baptized. Mark 16:16 is one of those scriptures: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” So being baptized as a baby, (or as an adult for that matter), does not make you a Christian. The act of baptizing a baby is more about the parents’ decision to begin a lifelong journey of faith for their little one. For the child, the decision to follow Christ will hopefully come as he or she grows in their knowledge and understanding of who Jesus is. Once the decision to follow Christ is made, the new believer should follow up with baptism. Baptism does not save you! It’s simply an outward sign of an inward decision. In addition, baptism is not an absolute requirement for salvation but Jesus did command it in Matt. 28:19.

On November 18, 2018, The Tennessee Volunteers men's basketball team was in New York City for the NIT Season Tip-off Tournament, but the team took a break from the court for a life changing moment for Kyle Alexander and Jordan Bowden. The two players took a big step in their Christian faith by getting baptized as their teammates watched. Coach Rick Barnes said what happened with Alexander and Bowden was far more important than any win they'd ever had.

- ***Going to church makes me a Christian.*** Not true. Christianity is more about living your life for Jesus *day after day* versus sitting in a church pew week after week. Being a follower of Jesus Christ is a lifestyle, not a weekly event. There's a famous saying by Billy Sunday that supports this statement: "Just going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car." It's not uncommon to hear people say, "I don't have to go to church to worship God." That is entirely true! Even so, God's word tells us not to neglect meeting together because we need one another! In Hebrews 10:24-25 we are asked to consider how we might spur one another on and encourage each other toward love and good deeds. This is done by "not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing."

Like many of you, professional athletes play games on Sundays which keeps them from attending church services. For that reason, the NBA and WNBA offer pregame chapel so the players can meet together for worship. It takes place sixty minutes before tip-off in every arena, no matter how high the stakes of the game. It's a regular routine for numerous players around the league—stretch, shoot, chapel. Ruth Riley Hunter, now retired from the WNBA states, "Pre-game chapels helped me give God my distractions and focus on his strength."

- ***I am not a sinner.*** Romans 3:23 says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." If that's not clear enough, 1 John 1:8 says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." But what if you've never been shown these scriptures? Would you know you're a sinner?

I vividly recall a day my sophomore year in high school. I was standing in a long hallway between the lunchroom and gym, having a conversation with a fellow classmate when he said the words, "I don't sin." I was shocked and dumbfounded. I suspect he, like many, thought sin only referred to "big things" such as murder, adultery, or stealing; but the reality is *all* sin separates us from God. And because sin separates us from God, we need a Savior to bring us back into right standing with God.

Here's some comforting news: when we choose to receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, we no longer have to be identified as a sinner, but as one who has been made righteous through Jesus Christ's finished work on the cross! As you begin to recognize sin in your own life, you might also begin to recognize the need for Jesus as your Savior. To fully understand our need for Jesus, let's extend our time out and explore the area of sin in the next chapter; but first, let's take a brief survey.

Personal Training

- Have any of the lies listed in this chapter fooled you into believing you are a Christian?
Yes _____ No _____
If you answered "yes", which one(s)?
 - After reading this chapter, do you have any concerns about your salvation? If the answer is yes, don't be discouraged. Keep reading!
 - According to scripture, how many ways lead to God? (refer to John 14:6)
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Post-Game Prayer

Heavenly Father, search my heart. If I have been trying to earn salvation by any means other than through Jesus Christ alone, reveal that to me right now. Your word is clear—*you* are the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to you except through Jesus. I can't earn my way there. I can't work my way there. I can't perform my way there. I need only to receive your free gift of grace, believe in the name of Jesus, confess and repent of my sin, and accept my new identity as a child of God. Give me a clear understanding of where I stand with you. As I continue to read the word that is presented, may the eyes of my heart be enlightened in order that I may know the hope to which you have called me, the riches of your glorious inheritance and your incomparable great power for those who believe! Amen. (Eph. 1:18-19)