

Life Begins with Christ

A personal relationship with God starts with self-examination. There are two questions that every individual ought to try to answer. The first question: **If you were to die today, do you know for certain that you would go to heaven?**

Scripture teaches us that we can know for sure, right now, whether we will go to heaven or not. 1 John 5:13 says, *"These things have I written unto you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life."*

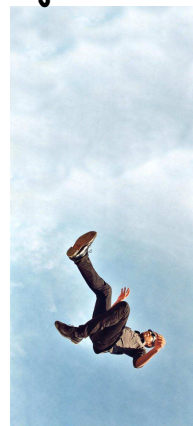
The second question: **If you were to die and stand before God, and He asks you, "Why should I let you come into heaven?" How would you answer Him?** Let's look at the Bible to find out how God would expect us to answer that question. To probe the answer, we will examine five principles that help us understand how we can come into a personal and eternal relationship with God. It follows the acrostic F.A.I.T.H.

F stands for FREE GIFT. The Bible teaches us that God loves us and offers eternal life to us as His free gift. *"The free gift of God is eternal life..."* (Romans 6:23)

Suppose a deliveryman came to your door with a gift from your grandmother. He has a brand new camera for you. To receive it, you only need to sign the register, signifying that it has been delivered. You don't need to write a check, or charge it; you simply need to accept the delivery of something that your grandmother has already paid for. A gift is something you don't earn or deserve- God's gift of eternal life is not something that we can earn or deserve.



A stands for ALIENATION! We are alienated from God because we have rejected God and broken His law.



Paul wrote in Romans 3:23, *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* There are absolute laws that govern our universe. The law of gravity makes sure that everything that goes up eventually comes down. There are also moral laws that govern our universe. These laws tell us to not lie, cheat, kill, or lose our temper. When we break these moral laws, it is called **sin**. If we were in a plane and decided to disregard the law of gravity by stepping out of the plane - we would die. When we disregard moral laws, the Bible says that we spiritually die. Romans 6:23 reminds us that, *"The wages of sin is death."*

We might consider a good person as one who sins 3 times a day or fewer. But over a typical lifespan they would accumulate 60 to 70 thousand offenses. If that man were to go to court with that many traffic violations, the judge would throw him in jail.

I stands for INCAPABLE. We are incapable of making things right with God.

Jesus reported that we must be perfect in order to please God. Jesus told His followers, *"Therefore you are to be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect."* (Matt. 5:48) But perfection is an impossible goal for us. Think about it. Suppose you had a great big balloon in hand, full of air. It is perfect-no holes at all. But then you make one tiny pinprick in the balloon. Though the balloon might still be 99.9% flawless, that one tiny puncture destroys the whole balloon. In the same way, it only takes one sin to disqualify the whole person. Perfection is like maintaining a 4 point average in school forever. Once a B grade has been earned, the best you could ever do is 3.999999999999999. God does not grade on the curve. Sin is extremely offensive to God. To present the Lord with a life tainted with sin would be as disgusting as giving Him a batch of brownies in which was mixed a small portion of dog droppings. Perfection is as hopeless as competing in a rock -throwing contest in which the moon is the target. Our sinful condition seemingly puts God in a dilemma of sorts, because on one hand, He loves us very much. He said these words through Jeremiah the prophet, *"I have loved you with an everlasting love."* (31:3b) But on the other hand, though He loves us, He has an obligation to uphold the law. He said through Ezekiel the prophet, *"I will by no means clear the guilty, says the Lord."* (34:7) But He has a solution.

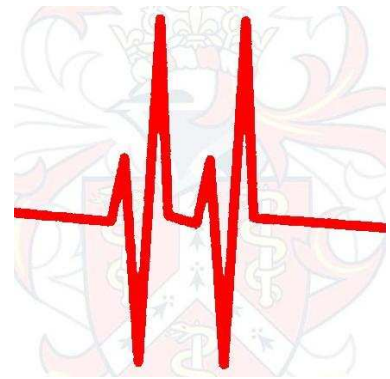
T stands for TRADE. He solved this apparent dilemma by sending Jesus, who chose to trade places with us. Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 5:21, *"He made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* Jesus was sent by God to serve the penalty that is due to you and me - that penalty is death. Suppose there was a teenager whose father was a judge in the city



courts. On one occasion, the teen violated several traffic laws and was arrested and brought to trial. The teen, by chance, happened to appear in his father's court. The teen admitted his guilt and the judge pounded the gavel on the desk and fined him \$1000, or 3 days in jail. Then the judge took off his robes, walked over to the bailiff and opened his wallet and paid the fine himself. As a judge, he made sure that justice was done, but as a father he paid the fine himself.

This is precisely what God did. Mankind stood before Him and pleaded guilty to the charge of being sinners. "I lied, I cheated, and I lost my temper." "The penalty is death," He declared! But then He took off his robes as God, slipped down to earth and went to pay that very same fine Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ. He died in our place. Not only did He pay the penalty for the crime; He also fulfilled all the requirements of the law. In the eyes of the law, the son's debt had been completely and perfectly paid.

When Jesus paid our penalty, He gave us an opportunity to have a perfect legal standing before God. In this sense, we can be "perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect." Or think of it this way. Suppose you are in a hospital dying of cancer and someone comes to you and says "Let's take the cancer from your body and put it into my body." In that case, you would live and he would die. Christ took the penalty that we deserved for sin, placed it upon Himself and died.



During the Great Depression, the police brought an elderly man before a New York City night court magistrate. The man was starving and had stolen a loaf of bread. That night the Mayor of NY, Fiorello LaGuardia was presiding over the court as he sometimes did to stay in touch with the citizens. He fined the old man \$10.00 "The law is the law, and cannot be broken," the mayor said. At the same time he took out a \$10.00 bill out of his wallet and paid the fine for the man. Then he cited each person in the courtroom for living in a city that did not help its poor and elderly thus unduly tempting them to steal. The mayor fined everyone in the audience 50 cents and gave the almost \$50.00 he collected to the amazed defendant.

In one stroke, the mayor paid the penalty for the man out of his own pocket and then enriched the man significantly. This is exactly what Christ accomplished for us. If this is so, why hasn't every person received God's gift?

H stands for the need to HAVE FAITH! To receive eternal life we must have faith that Christ died in our place. Faith is the way we reach out our hands to God and accept His free gift. God tells us in Ephesians 2:8-9, *"For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast..."*

Remember the story about the delivery man? He was making a delivery. You didn't need to write a check, or charge it you simply needed to accept the delivery of something that was already paid for. A man once asked the Apostle Paul what he needed to do to go to Heaven and Paul said in Acts 16:31 *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."*

Blondin was a famous 19th century tightrope walker. He was most famous for his walking a cable strung over Niagara Falls (a chasm 1,100 ft. wide). His tightrope extended 160 ft. above the raging waters. He once walked across the falls pushing a wheelbarrow along. Upon reaching the other side, he asked if folks thought he could make it back with a person in his wheelbarrow. They all were confident he could do it so he asked for a volunteer. No one believed in him enough to actually get in his wheelbarrow. His business manager finally got in to save the show. Faith is believing that Christ can save you and building your life upon that fact. Faith is getting into Christ's wheelbarrow.



Most of us would look at a 727 jet on the tarmac at the airport and be pretty confident that the plane will reach its destination. Faith requires getting in the plane and trusting both the plane and the pilot to take you safely there.

There are other planes parked at the airport today that make promises to get us to the destination of eternal life. One airplane is marked- "Eastern Religion"; another- "Good Works"; still another- "Islam". A person might want to cover all the bases to make sure he or she gets to heaven, but just as it is a physical impossibility to be on more than one plane at a time, it is also impossible to trust in more than one Savior at a time. To trust in two is to trust in neither. We must place our faith in Christ alone and trust Him to get us to our eternal destination.

CONSIDERATION

Remember the second question that was asked way back at the beginning? If God were to ask, "Why should I let you come into heaven?"- How would you answer Him? Based on what we have studied from God's Word, what answer would He expect to hear? Is there any reason why you should not receive this gift?

If you would like to ask Christ to be your Savior, you could pray a prayer similar to this one. ***"Lord Jesus, I want to know you personally. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving me of my sins and giving me eternal life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."***

If you would like to discuss this please contact us and we will be glad to help.