Basic Christianity
Little Watchman
Copyright 2013 littlewatchman.com
All rights reserved.
Published in Australia
First Publishing April 2013
Smashwords Edition

Thank you for downloading this free ebook. Although this is a free book, it remains the copyrighted property of the author, and may not be reproduced, copied and distributed for commercial or non-commercial purposes. If you enjoyed this book, please encourage your friends to download their own copy at Smashwords.com, where they can also discover other works by this author. Thank you for your support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

This is a collection of basic teaching for new Christians.

Introduction

Church

What is church really and how do I fit in there?

Sin

How do I know what is a sin and what isn't?

Salvation_

How can I be sure I'm saved?

Prayer_

Are there any special rules for praying?

The Bible

Where did the Bible come from? How often should I read it?

And what happens in Bible Study groups?

Baptism_

What is baptism (in water) all about?

The Lord's Supper_

What is the bread and wine about and who can take it?

Giving

What is giving about and how much should I give?

The Beginning

How and when was the world created and what was it like?

The End_

What will happen at the end of the world?

Now What?_

Introduction

This is a collection of basic teaching for new Christians. It comes from a series of articles available on www.littlewatchman.com

This basic level of teaching is what the apostle Paul refers to as spiritual milk. It's a bit easier to "digest" than some of the meatier, more advanced teaching that you might be hearing in other places. But as a spiritual baby it's good for you to just have some milk for a while until you get more used to it. Then you will have a good foundation for when you grow up and you are ready to study deeper things.

At the end of each section there is a list of recommended Bible reading. Usually when you read Christian books you will find references all over them quoting a verse here and a verse there. But quoting verses out of context is dangerous and it can give you the wrong idea about what it means, so I would much rather give you a whole chapter to read and then you can do a little bit of work understanding the context and finding the relevant verses yourself. This will also help you later when you need to study things for yourself.

I really hope you find the teaching here to be a blessing in your life. I hope it inspires you to want to learn more.

Church

In the Bible the word translated church means "a group of people called together for some purpose".

Church is not a building, church is a group of Christians.

In English we do also use the same word to mean the building that Christians usually meet in. But for now, let's stick to the Biblical meaning of the actual people.

There is nothing in the Bible about how often you have to gather with other members of your church.

So you can go as often as you like!

Even every day if you want.

In the beginning of the book of Acts (which is the story of the first years of the church), they met together in each others' houses every day. Read it, it was amazing. It would have been great to have been there.

Also in Acts, we see that when they met they had some teaching, some fellowship with each other, some food, and lots of prayer. Quite a different focus than you would find in many modern churches. But there is no rule about what we do when we gather. It's just important that we get together.

The most important thing about church is that if you are a Christian, then you are part of it. Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 both talk about the church being like a body. One person is the arm, one is a leg, or an eye, or an ear... And then Jesus is the head, coordinating the whole thing. It's amazing, we literally are Jesus' body on Earth - his hands, his feet.

God made you unique to fit exactly into his church. So you need to find out which bit you are. Ask older Christians or your church leader to help you if you don't know. And then focus on being the best one of those bits you can be.

If you're really good at doing practical things, then focus on that. If you are really good at leading people, focus on that. If you are really good at praying, focus on that.

Think about what you love doing. Find a way to do that as part of a church.

And if you're really not sure, just ask if you can try lots of different things in church and keep going until you find one that fits you. It will be there somewhere.

The role of the church as a whole is to show the world what Jesus is like by living it out. And telling them about him so that they can become part of the church too.

Jesus said, "love one another the way I have loved you and the world will know you are my disciples". Get to know your church. Get to love them. It will take effort, but you'll find a way. God will help you.

So, get together with your church as often as you can. Spend time, not just in "meetings", but eating and praying together and just hanging out with them.

Love them. Love your church. The rest will flow from there.

Reading

Acts 2 Romans 12 1 Corinthians 12

Revelation 2, 3 1 Corinthians 14

Sin

In the Old Testament God gave "The Law" to the Jews. The most famous part of the Law was the Ten Commandments. It was a list of things the Jews either had to do or weren't allowed to do. So for Jews defining what was a sin came down to what was allowed, or not allowed, in the Law.

But Jesus fulfilled the Law and it was nailed to the cross with him. So Christians are not under the Law. We don't have a list of things we can and can't do. For us, sin is defined by our motive. Not what you do, but why you do it.

We should always put God first. Our actions should always be motivated by love for others. Sin is basically selfishness. It's when I think I'm more important than others, or more important than God.

So two Christians could do the same action, and for one it may be a sin and for the other not.

Even if I am giving money to the poor, but if I am doing it so that everyone sees me and thinks that I am a great guy. Then that is selfish, that's pride, it's all about me. It's a sin.

Some sins are also worse than others.

But surprisingly the worst ones aren't murder and rape, they are the inside things, like pride and greed.

And finally, one important thing about sin.

We all sin. God will confront our sins one by one as he helps us to change our behaviour over the years. But he decides which order to do that. So, don't judge other Christians for their sin. God will deal with them in his time too. You just worry about your own sin. Besides, sin is about motive and you do not know what is going on inside the other person. So how do you even know if they are sinning?

Reading

Romans 1 Galatians 3 Romans 6 James 4

Salvation

Being saved basically means you are going to live with God forever in a good place after you die.

Not being saved means you are going to "live" without God forever in a bad place after you die.

So it matters whether you are saved or not!

Your (everyone's) big problem is that God's standard of behaviour is absolute 100% perfection.

He demands that you never do anything wrong, ever. Not even anything little. (It's a high standard!)

Your problem of course is the same as mine. You don't do that.

So now your sin separates you from God. Forever.

About 3,500 years ago God gave Moses and the Israelites a system where they could cover up their sin by sacrificing bulls and sheep. They had to be perfect specimens, and the blood of the animal covered over the offense that had been committed when they sinned.

About 2,000 years ago Jesus, God's son came to Earth and lived a perfect life. And because he did that, God accepted his life as a sacrifice for our sin.

But unlike the blood of the animals, the blood of Jesus actually washes away our sin. It removes it completely

And he gives us this as a gift. That's amazing isn't it.

So, you sinned, you were separated from God.

And Jesus lived a perfect life and was not separated from God.

But Jesus died, as a free gift to us, so that we can be reunited with God because our sin has now gone.

This is salvation.

It's 100% based on what Jesus did for us 2,000 years ago, and 0% based on what we do now.

We didn't earn it. In fact, we can't earn it even if we try.

That also means we can't lose it because it's not based on our actions, it's based on Jesus' action.

There is one more important thing about salvation.

John says in chapter 3 of his book that whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life.

He says it again in his letter (1 John), in chapter 5. If you believe in Jesus you can KNOW that you have eternal life.

You don't have to wait until you die to find out if you have eternal life. You know already. Your sin is dealt with and you already have eternal life.

BTW: If you read the last book of the Bible (Revelation) which was also written by John, you'll see at the end of that book that we don't go to Heaven to "live in the clouds playing harps" forever, but that one day God will destroy this Earth and make a new one.

One which is made perfect and where nobody sins. That's where we'll be living
See you there.

Reading

Romans 3 John 3 Ephesians 2 Revelation 21

Prayer

Prayer is basically a conversation with God.

It's not a shopping list, or like a list for Santa, "I want a... and a... and a...".

It's a conversation.

Spend some time listening.

Hearing back can take many forms and that's for another lesson. But the simplest way is to have your Bible open and ask God to speak to you from it.

Maybe even let God go first from time to time. After all, he is God and you are just a person.

If you went to talk with your own king or president wouldn't you let them go first?

And if you're praying in a group it's OK to turn to one of the others and ask them a question about something they just said. It's conversation after all.

You don't have to close your eyes to pray.

As you read prayers in the Bible you'll notice that they usually were looking up to Heaven or flat on their face on the ground.

But sometimes closing your eyes does help you focus. So it's not wrong either.

I think you should only pray about things you really care about.

Sometimes I think we waste our time praying for things when to be honest, we don't really care if God answers them or not.

Elijah prayed earnestly that it would not rain and it didn't rain for years.

Remember that the Holy Spirit is in you. He will bring things to your mind and burden your heart so you are almost bursting to pray for them.

And be real with God. There is no need to hold back your feelings. He is your Father. Be open. Expose your heart to him.

Paul says you should pray without ceasing. That might take some getting used to.

For now just pray whenever you feel like it.

Or when you particularly don't feel like it.

But don't feel bad if you skip the times in between.

There is a lot of legalism about prayer. Don't fall into that trap.

If God burdens you to pray. Pray. If he doesn't, don't feel bad.

You also probably hear a lot of people ending their prayer with "In Jesus name, Amen", or something like that.

Amen is a Hebrew word and it just means "I agree" or "truly". We usually use it to signal to others that we're done.

The "In Jesus' name" bit is because Jesus said we could ask anything in his name and the Father would grant it.

But he didn't mean tack it on at the end like a signature or a magic phrase.

It's kind of like the old signet rings that kings used to have. If a decree or order was stamped with the king's ring it was legally binding. And if the king entrusted you to run things for him he would give you the ring. So you could "sign" things as if you were the king, and they would be treated as if the king has signed them himself.

Jesus meant something like that. You (a guilty sinner) have no right to ask God for anything. He graciously does let you ask, but you have no right. But as a Christian,

God sees you very differently. But remember, this is only because of Jesus, it's not because of you.

Basically Jesus has given you authority to use his name when you request things from God. You may say to God, "Jesus said I could ask for my daughter to be healed". It's as if you have been given permission to use Jesus' signet ring when you request something from God.

Sadly some people treat it like a magic phrase for ending prayer.

Sometimes I deliberately don't even mention Jesus name in a prayer to make a point. But of course, in my heart I know my only right to be heard comes from the fact that I do come to God in Jesus' name.

Some people try to put on a different voice, or different attitude when they pray. Don't do that. Just be real.

And don't worry if there are pauses. It's a conversation.

Some people say "Lord" all the time in their prayer to fill in the gaps. I find that annoying. I think God would find that annoying too, but he's more gracious about it than me.

Try to record your prayer and then play it back to yourself. (on your phone, or something like that). Listen to yourself pray.

And finally, there are some things you really don't even need to ask for.

God guarantees to provide you with food, shelter and clothing (read Matthew 6). Not only if you ask for them.

Just like if you were a child. (Your earthly father will provide you with food, shelter, safety at night, things like that right? Kid's don't need to keep asking their Dad for those, they just know that their Dad is there and all that stuff comes).

We can trust God to provide those things without having to ask him all the time.

There are more things that you can just trust God for without asking. You will find them.

Remember that your only right to be heard is because you come in the name of Jesus.

Pray as often as you feel led.

Pray aloud as much as you can.

Pray for others more than you pray for yourself.

Pray with others.

Pray.

Reading

John 17 Matthew 6 James 5 John 14 Luke 5:16

The Bible

Who Wrote It

The Bible is actually a collection of 66 books and letters.

39 of them were written for Jews before Jesus was born. The other 27 were written for Christians after Jesus died.

Somewhere around the 4th century AD, the Christian leaders of that time gathered all the different writings and letters that they had together. From those they selected the 66 that we have now as being genuine and bound them together into one collection "The Bible".

The first 39 are called the Old Testament, that means the old covenant, or old contract.

They were written by a whole bunch of guys ranging from Moses (around 1,400BC) through to King David (1,000BC) and on to Malachi (400BC). There is a lot of Jewish history there, some poetry, songs, and some interesting prophecy. It's basically God's story from the time he made the world up until a few hundred years before Jesus was born.

The last 27 are called the New Testament, the new covenant, new contract. Jesus basically wrote a new contract and now God is dealing with people in a different way than he did before.

The New Testament was written by another bunch of guys from around Jesus' time. Most of them would have seen Jesus walking around Israel.

A lot of the New Testament "books" are actually letters that people wrote to churches or individuals throughout that part of Asia Minor (what we now call Turkey). It's basically the story of Jesus and the church.

There are four books that talk about Jesus' life on earth. And there are a lot of letters that explain a important things about God, church, and Jesus. Right at the end of the New Testament there is a revelation which one of Jesus' disciples received about the end of the world. That one can be a bit hard to understand but it's interesting reading. And once you get the bigger picture of what God is doing with Israel and the church, it sort of falls into place.

Different Versions

There are heaps of different versions of the Bible (especially in English). The New International Version, the American Standard Version, the New King James Version, the Message, and many more.

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew. For the Jews.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek. For everyone. (Greek was the common language at the time of Jesus).

So if you have an English Bible then what you have is a translation of the originals into English. That's why there are so many versions.

When you are translating another language you have certain principles that you follow. You might choose to try to convey the original meaning as much as possible,

without being concerned about the exact words. I might prefer to be as literal as possible with every word.

Just like with modern language translation. If you get ten people to translate the same story from Japanese to English you might get several different versions. Of course they will be basically the same, and the underlying message will be the same, but they way they express it might be a little different.

So, choose the translation that you like reading. Especially as a new Christian what you really need to do is to read it. Later on you might find your preference for a particular version will change. That's no problem.

Reading It

If you're not sure where to start reading, then read Mark or Luke. They have the stories of Jesus' life on Earth and they're easier to understand than some of the others when you're just starting out.

When you read it is important to be aware of which part of the Bible it came from. Things that apply to Jews don't necessarily apply to Christians, so it's easy to get confused sometimes. Even in the New Testament, the stories from when Jesus was on Earth are sometimes about him talking with Jews and sometimes about Christians.

You'll get it. Try to develop the habit of always trying to understand who wrote it, to whom, when. And what was their general context.

Read the Bible as often as you have time.

If you can read 4 chapters a day you can read the whole thing in one year.

One of the guys who wrote a lot of the New Testament was a Jew called Paul who became a Christian. Paul said that you can only understand spiritual truth if the Holy Spirit reveals it to you. So if you find that something is confusing or unclear... just wait (and pray). One day the Holy Spirit will make it clear to you. But be patient.

Studying It

The other thing that will help you will be Bible study with other Christians.

Probably your church will organise those for you. If not, ask your friends, or people you respect and one of them will find something for you. This is a good way to get to know the Bible better. After all, it's the only book we have where God reveals to us what he is really like. The Bible is your best way to get to know God.

Your Bible study group will also get to know you pretty well and make friends with you. They will be a great support for you as a young Christian (and for old Christians too!).

The other really great thing to do with the Bible is to memorise it. The Navigators have a really cool "starter kit" called the Topical Memory System. It has scripture cards and a study booklet to help you memorise some of the most common and most useful Bible verses. I really recommend it.

Even better, memorise it in a group, or with a friend.

And you can always make your own memory verse cards with business card paper and a printer.

So, read it, study it, memorise it, talk about it, and most of all... apply it to your life. The Bible is one book that really can change your life.

Reading

1 Corinthians 2 2 Timothy 3 James 1 Revelation 1

Baptism

Baptism is kind of like a wedding.

When you love someone and want to spend the rest of your life committed to them exclusively, you have a wedding ceremony. It's a public statement which declares your love for each other before God and to all your friends.

When you follow Jesus and want to spend the rest of your life committed to him exclusively (in the spiritual sense), you have a baptism. It's a public statement which declares your love for him before God and to all your friends.

It's a way of saying publicly that you are a Christian and that you take that seriously, and you intend to keep doing so for the rest of your life.

How you "do" baptism isn't really important. It's a symbolic thing. It's the public statement that is important.

But in the Bible, it does seem that baptism usually involved someone being physically immersed (completely under) some water like a river or lake, and then being brought up again.

That makes sense because this symbol of baptism represents how you also died with Christ on the cross and were buried and resurrected with him.

This bit may be hard to comprehend right now as a young Christian, but in some way you died 2,000 years ago! You (in fact all Christians) were in Jesus when he went to the cross and so, when he died, you died.

And so of course, when he rose again, you rose again. You were effectively born again.

Don't worry if you don't get that bit right now. You will in time. Until then, just think of baptism as a way of publically declaring your decision to follow Jesus.

In Bible times, if you stood up publicly and said, "Hey everyone, I'm a Christian now." Then you may well lose your job, or even your life. It was a big deal to declare that you were a Christian in those days. So people wouldn't doubt anyone that said they wanted to be baptised, and they were usually baptised that very day.

These days it's not such a social and political risk to declare that you are a Christian (in most countries), and some people who are not Christians still want to be baptised. (Usually they don't realise what it's really about and they just want to fit in). Because of this, most churches ask you to do a short Bible study course before they baptise you. This is not really necessary from a Biblical point of view, but it's just their way of feeling like they made sure you were really a Christian before they baptise you (and basically publicly declare that they think you are too). It's not necessary, but if that's what your church wants then go along with it. You might learn something anyway, and at least you'll meet the pastor and some other Christians.

Reading

Matthew 3 Acts 2 Acts 8 1 Peter 3

The Lord's Supper

Sometimes the Lord's Supper is called communion. It's basically when we have bread and wine as a church in memory of Jesus' sacrifice for us.

The first "Lord's Supper" was in the upper room during Jesus' last Passover meal with his disciples the night before he went to the cross. It was part of a meal. And when his disciples first instituted this as a church after Jesus' death and resurrection, they also did it as part of a meal.

Sometime during the meal, someone will give thanks to God for the bread which represents Jesus' body/flesh which was sacrificed for us. Sometime later, not necessarily straight away, someone will give thanks to God for the cup or the wine which represents Jesus' blood which was poured out for us.

(The Bible says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Around the time of Moses God introduced the Law and the sacrificial system of the Old Testament where priests would shed animal blood to cover over any sins the people had committed. And then, finally, Jesus shed his own blood, not just to cover up, but to completely wash away our sin).

These days many churches skip the meal (which I think is a shame) and they just have a ceremony where we eat bread and drink wine. The idea is still there. The bread and wine are symbols of Jesus.

Some churches (like the Catholics) teach that the bread actually becomes the body/flesh of Jesus when the priest prays. This is not correct. It's just bread. It's a symbol.

Some churches use little wafers instead of bread. I think that's a shame too. The original bread was Passover bread. Unleavened bread. Bread made without yeast. It represented Jesus body made without sin.

Also, it was one loaf broken into pieces so that each person could have some. But they all shared in one loaf. A bit hard to do in a church of 2,000 people, but it was also symbolic of how we are all saved by the one sacrifice of Jesus.

Some churches use grape juice instead of wine. Usually they say it is in case there are any alcoholics in the church. But usually they say that even when they know there are not any alcoholics in the church.

Jesus made wine. Wine is OK to drink (just don't get drunk). And if you know there are no alcoholics in your church, then I think you should use wine. But that is up to you.

You can have the Lord's Supper in a small group, like at Bible Study or with Christian friends in your home too. Try it, it's usually a very powerful moment. Maybe you can even try to incorporate it with a meal.

Some churches also get very caught up on who can partake, and they have strict rules. I figure that if anyone understands what it's about, they can eat it. But again, just do what your church says.

If you really don't like it, change churches.

Basically, it's symbolic. So don't get caught up on how they do it in your church. Just make sure you participate. And make sure you take it seriously. You are remembering

the biggest sacrifice in history. And you are on the receiving end! Remember what Jesus has done for you, and be humbled.

Reading

Leviticus 4 Exodus 12 Luke 22 1 Corinthians 10

Giving

What giving comes down to is that nothing you have is really yours. It all belongs to God anyway.

So we're not really giving to him, we're just giving some of his stuff back to him and keeping less for ourselves.

In the Old Testament the Jews had to give 10% of their income to the priests at the temple.

But we are not the Jews. They had heaps of rules and regulations. Jesus did away with all that for us by fulfilling it on the cross.

So we don't have any rules about giving.

God doesn't need your money, what he is looking for is to see if your heart is willing to let go of the security you have with money and to just trust him.

The most important thing is that you feel like you are giving generously. If you're being generous then you're probably OK. If you don't feel like you're being generous, perhaps you should give more.

The second most important thing is that you try to keep your giving a secret. Try not to let the person you give it to know who it's from. (if you can).

But give.

To your church.

To your pastor.

To missionaries.

To Christians you meet who need help.

Buy books for people.

Buy food for people.

Invite people over for dinner.

It doesn't all have to go in the bag/plate at church. But make sure you are feeling generous.

Reading

Matthew 6 Mark 12 2 Corinthians 9 Exodus 35, 36

The Beginning

I read the Bible literally. If you don't read it literally then it quickly becomes all up to you which bits are literal and which bits aren't. And you can get yourself onto dangerous ground very quickly.

The Bible is pretty clear about the creation of the world.

According to the Bible, God made the Earth, and everything else around us, in 6 literal days.

And, basically by tracing back all the genealogies, you can work out that he did it only 6,000 years ago.

In fact, the Bible says that Jesus made everything 4,000 years before he was "born". (Jesus always existed, even before the creation of the world!)

Originally God made a fabulous garden called Eden, where Adam, the first man, and his wife Eve lived in a perfect paradise.

But Eve was tricked by Satan into disobeying God, and then Adam chose to disobey him as well.

This is how sin entered the world. And since then, all the way down the line from Adam, we have all inherited our sinful nature from our parents.

The Bible also teaches us that about 4,500 years ago there was a flood that covered the entire planet, after which the mountains were pushed up to their current height. This was God's punishment for mankind who had become so rebellious and sinful. As you probably know, the only people who were saved were Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives.

Eight people from the whole planet!

BTW: before the flood, (and for a little while afterwards), people lived for a long time

Adam lived to be 930 years old. That means that Adam was still alive when Noah's father was born.

And Noah lived 950 years too. 350 years after the flood, and he only died about 60 years before Abraham was born.

God had told people to spread out and to multiply on the Earth. But they had other plans. They built a big city and tried to build a tower all the way to heaven! So a couple of hundred years after the flood God intervened again. This time he confused the language of men to force them to spread out, and to stop them building their tower.

Before this, everyone on the planet had spoken the same language.

And then, another couple of hundred years after that, God chose one man, Abram, whom he renamed Abraham. And then Abraham's descendants through his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob (whom God renamed Israel). He chose this family to be his people.

We know them as the Jews.

The rest, as we say... is history.

Well, actually, it's *all* history.

Reading

Genesis 1-3

Genesis 7-9

Genesis 11

Genesis 12

Colossians 1

Romans 5

The End

Right now is the church age.

Also called the age of the Gentiles. (Gentiles is everybody except the Jews).

Up until 2,000 years ago, God had a special people.

His people.

The Jews.

Actually he still does, but right now his relationship with them is kind of suspended. (Because they rejected his son Jesus).

And because of that God extended his offer of salvation to the Gentiles (and to any Jews who would accept it).

One day, hopefully soon, the age of the Gentiles will come to an end. When it does, God will take his church away in an instant. We will be gone. We will meet Jesus in the air and go with him to Heaven.

But then a dark and terrible time of judgement will come upon the Earth.

God will restore his covenant with Israel, but for 7 years he will pour out his anger on the Earth.

At the end of that time, Jesus himself will return to Jerusalem to deliver the Jews from their enemies. He will reign over the entire planet from Jerusalem for 1,000 years. During that time Satan will be bound in prison, but at the end of the millennium of peace, Satan will be released for one last battle.

Jesus will of course be victorious and Satan and his demons will be thrown into the lake of fire.

All the dead will be resurrected to judgement. Those who have believed in Jesus to eternal life, and those who have not to eternal "death".

Finally, God will create a new Earth. He will make a new Jerusalem (In John's vision of it, it had streets of gold and huge pearls for gates). And Jesus and those who believe in him will live there together forever.

It's very tempting to get into speculation about details and about times. But the important thing for us, is that God has it all worked out. He has everything covered, and things will in fact turn out exactly 100% as he has planned. We don't need to get caught up in exactly when that will happen.

Reading

Matthew 24, 25 2 Thessalonians 2 Zechariah 14 1 Corinthians 15 Revelation 20-22

Now What?

One of the best things you could do as a young Christian is to find a mentor. Someone who will disciple you.

That doesn't just mean that they will do a weekly Bible study with you, but find someone you can hang out with pretty often. That way you will see their Christianity in action.

Do a lot of reading. Read the Bible. Read Christian books. Your mentor will recommend some for you. But God will lead you to some as well.

Pray as much as you can.

Try to get involved in your church.

Give yourself 100% to God and be willing to let go of your own desires.

Thank you for reading this little book. I really do hope it helped you.

###