



## “What Difference Does Christianity Make”

By: Doug Warren

### What difference does Christianity make?

I am often asked what difference, if any, a person’s belief in Christianity makes in life (theirs and others’ around them). I am asked this question both by skeptics wondering at the possible relevance of faith in the twenty-first century and by Christians seeking to apply their faith to more than just their Sunday schedule. It is a good question that deserves a thoughtful answer.

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#### Radical Difference

The title “Christ” means “anointed one” and refers to the offices of prophet, priest, and king pointed to in the Hebrew Scriptures and ultimately fulfilled by Jesus. Those who follow him were dubbed “Christians” early in the history of the church. Following Jesus is much more than just a belief or cultural identity. Jesus never presented following him as any kind of special interest that should only affect a portion of a person’s life. He called people to abandon everything to follow him. Christianity is intended to make a radical difference in the lives of his followers.

One of the reasons for the radical nature of Christianity is that it is about a person, not just a moral code. If you decide to turn from Buddhism to Confucianism there are differences in practice, but the search for tranquility remains essentially the same. With Christianity there is a radical departure from pursuing peace with God by means other than Jesus, into resting in his complete provision of that peace. This is not the trading of one code of conduct for another (similar or different), but a fundamental admission of brokenness before the Creator of the code. The relationship with him provides the break from all other systems.

This radical departure from performance-based acceptance should then lead to a radical difference in both behavior and motivation. Christians are freed from the treadmill of good works, not just so that they can do whatever they want, but so that they can do the very good works God intends for them out of joy instead of drudgery. Now you may be thinking, “What is so radically different about that?” Think about a time when you were able to do something for someone, not because you *had* to, but because you *wanted* to. It is a radical difference indeed.

#### Transformational Difference

This freedom also leads to transformation. People who have been freed from slavish duty are not only more joyous; they become change-agents. Christianity properly understood and applied begins a chain-reaction transforming individual lives, families, and whole communities. There is no way to simply maintain the status quo in Christianity. There is no neutral territory, no issue that is insignificant, and no person who matters too little. Everything must be considered in regard to this relationship with Christ. It changes everything.

That’s the nature of transformation. Not only is the individual changed, but now everything that individual touches is redefined, rediscovered, or realigned. When people are released from substance abuse, for example, it does far more than affect their internal world. The ripples are far-reaching: work, family, friendships, and the broader community all feel an impact. Being brought into a relationship with Jesus brings about that kind of revolution.

Consider for a moment some of the areas this might include. Your career becomes much more than providing for your family or your ego, because God has a calling for you to use the gifts and abilities he has entrusted to you for his glory. Care for the environment now involves your responsibility as a steward of the creation Jesus has made and his heart to reclaim what has been destroyed, marred, and neglected. Your advocacy of social justice receives greater passion as you come to recognize the righteousness of Christ and his heart for those who are marginalized and exploited in our society. Appreciation and participation in the arts takes on new value as expressions of beauty by a Creator who is beautiful. Your championing deeds of mercy grows as you internalize Christ's compassion to you and see others as needing the same grace you have experienced.

All of creation is God's domain. Everything is considered in view of our relationship to him. His work in redeeming a lost creation becomes central not only to all that we do, but to all that we are. These works of transformation are the calling of all those who have become followers of Christ.

### Restorative Difference

Being a Christian is intended to bring about both radical and transformational difference in the lives of those who are following Christ. It should also make a restorative difference. That is, all this radical and life-changing activity should be going somewhere. At the heart of Christianity is reconciliation--two or more persons being brought back into a right relationship. This involves restoring our relationship with God and with other people. We find God at work not only in our lives, but working through us to bring about restoration and reconciliation in countless ways.

Following Jesus means recognizing our need for him; it means going with him as he brings healing and wholeness to lives and communities torn apart. Historically we have seen this in myriad contexts. Hospitals established and built to bring Christ's compassion to a destitute area. Slavery abolished through tireless work, blood, and tears. Orphanages founded to care for helpless little ones discarded by their families. All of these things bring restoration to individuals *and* to the broader community. The general public benefits from the restorative presence of God's people living out the difference he has made in our lives.

There is a great deal of difference that Christianity should make in the lives of Christ's followers and in all those around us. When Jesus said, "Come follow me" it was a radical call to transformational living that would bring about restoration not only to the individual, but eventually to the whole world. That is quite a difference indeed.

A word about these changes—You may have noticed that Christians you know don't exhibit all these radical, transformational, and restorative changes in their lives. These differences are neither automatic nor instantaneous, but they are the result of a personal relationship with Jesus. Often these changes are painstakingly slow in manifesting themselves, but one of the great hopes of following Jesus is that he is faithful even when we are not and he will make these changes in his timing.