

Now That You're a Christian

Bruce BICKEL
&
Stan JANTZ



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

All Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189 USA. All rights reserved.

CHRISTIANITY 101 is a registered trademark of Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz. Harvest House Publishers, Inc., is the exclusive licensee of the federally registered trademark CHRISTIANITY 101.

Cover by Left Coast Design, Portland, Oregon

Cover illustration © Krieg Barrie Illustration

Bruce Bickel: Published in association with the literary agency of Mark Sweeney & Associates, 28540 Altessa Way, Ste. 201, Bonita Springs, FL 34135.

NOW THAT YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN

Copyright © 2005 by Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN-13: 978-0-7369-2316-3

ISBN-10: 0-7369-2316-0

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 / BP-MS / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

A Personal Note	5
What God Has Done for You	6
God Has Saved You Forever	7
Your New Life in Christ	11
You Have an Inside Source	15
What God Wants You to Do	19
Read the Bible	20
Learn to Pray	24
Go to Church	28
Having God's Heart	32
Loving One Another	33
Becoming a Disciple	37
Sharing Your Faith	40
More to Help You Grow	43

God Has Saved You Forever

The Bible reveals God's plan to establish a relationship with humanity. The Bible has lots of verses (a total of 31,101 to be exact), but we can quickly direct you to the one that sums it up succinctly:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Let's dissect this verse to look at several of the components of salvation:

1. *"For God so loved the world..."* This is an incredible concept that is even more amazing than it might appear. Remember that God is perfect, and humanity is not. God is holy, and we are far from it. We aren't just a few notches below God on the righteousness scale; He is at the top, and we don't even make the chart. Yet God loves us in our "as is" condition. Despite all of our failings, flaws, and imperfections, He loves us.
2. *"...that he gave his only Son..."* We weren't pursuing Him; He initiated the steps to connect with us. Because our sins prevented the connection, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was necessary to pay the penalty that we deserved.
3. *"...so that everyone who believes in him..."* Christianity is not limited to those of a particular country, political

group, ethnicity, or economic standing. It is available to everyone. The only criterion is *belief*. We have the choice to accept or reject God's offer of salvation. Our acceptance takes the form of believing that Christ's death and resurrection is the means by which our sins are forgiven and we establish a relationship with Christ. Belief is more than just intellectual acknowledgment of these facts; it includes intentionally choosing to follow God's plan rather than our own selfish desires.

4. "...will not perish but have eternal life." The physical death that awaits humanity is not the end; as spiritual beings with a soul, we have eternity before us. Christians will spend that eternity with Christ. But eternal life doesn't kick in only upon our death; it begins at the moment of our salvation.

The concepts that John 3:16 explains are examples of God's grace. *Grace* is a theological word that simply means "unmerited favor." God loves us, but we've done nothing to deserve His gift of salvation. Think about what God's grace means to you on a personal level:

- *God loves you unconditionally.* What you have done in the past doesn't matter. And because God already knows what you are going to do in the future, that doesn't matter either. His love doesn't hinge on what you've done or not done; it is unconditional because He is a God of grace.
- *God's salvation is a gift that none of us deserve.* This is a "come as you are" offer. You don't have to clean up your act to qualify. The offer isn't extended to you because you are good. Just the opposite. You aren't, and God knows you don't stand a chance of escaping hell without His gift of salvation. But don't ever think that just because salvation is free and readily available to you that

it must be cheap. Always remember that your salvation came at the cost of Christ's own death on the cross.

- *You can do nothing to make God love you more.* Because God's love for you is already limitless, you don't have to worry about satisfying periodic performance testing to stay in His good graces. Oh, sure, you'll probably want to align your lifestyle to fall within His principles, but that will happen as you realize that God's blueprint for living makes sense. You are not under pressure to rack up brownie points with God; He wants your allegiance to Him to be motivated by love, not forced compliance.
- *You can do nothing to make God love you less.* Don't worry about God imposing some divine guilt trip on you. Sure, He desires that you live according to His principles. But God isn't going to love you less if you blow it from time to time. You won't be living under pressure to satisfy some angelic behavioral standard to retain your salvation. Doesn't that take some pressure off? Doesn't that make you more grateful for His grace?

In Bible terminology, *faith* and *belief* mean more than a confidence in certain circumstances (such as "I have faith in gravity" or "I believe gas prices will rise"). The kind of faith that leads to salvation involves your mind (belief), your spirit (trust), and your heart (adoration).

1. *Faith starts with belief.* Some skeptics of Christianity say it is only for the impressionable, the ignorant, the irrational, or the deluded. They say that faith requires the willful suspension of intellect. Nothing could be further from the truth. You are not saved by ignoring facts or truth. Just the opposite. Faith requires belief in (realization and appreciation of) the truth that Jesus is who He said He is, that the Bible is true, and that Christ is the way of salvation.

2. *Faith moves forward with trust.* Trust means that you have enough confidence in God to give Him ownership of your life. You are certain that His plan for you is better than your plan for yourself. And you are willing to build your life on that trust.
3. *Faith results in worship.* A sure sign of saving faith is the desire to worship God (to *worship* means to adore God, to give Him praise and reverent devotion, and to acknowledge His supremacy in all things). This type of worship rises naturally from an appreciation for the gift of salvation at the great cost of the sacrificial death of Jesus. A response of gratitude to God flows from true faith.

You exercised faith when you became a Christian, but the work of salvation was all on God's part. That means that the continuation of your salvation is not in jeopardy. If salvation were based on your constant compliance with a code of conduct, you'd lose out as soon as you slipped up. But since your salvation comes through God's grace and not by your performance, the gift of salvation is guaranteed forever. It's a done deal that won't be revoked. No one—not even you by your own screw-ups—can take away what Christ has paid for with His death. This is the concept of *eternal security*, and the Bible clearly states that nothing can invalidate your salvation:

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away...nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).