

only upon His discretion in choosing them. He never makes any attempt to explain His choice, other than His sovereign prerogative. He then went on to formally establish them (the Israelites or Jews by this time), as His people through certain ceremonies by which He entered a relationship with them. He assured them that the ceremonies were not magically efficacious in themselves, but that they did work in removing sin and consecrating them because He had set it to be so. The relationship was maintained by conformity to His nature, which He described by setting down a code of laws for them to follow based on His unchanging nature. The Bible also records the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the fulfillment of the relationship God established with His people. In Jesus the relationship with God in its purest, highest form is now offered to all people, Jew and Gentile, who become heirs of all the promises God made to His people in the past. Salvation by faith, then, is recognizing that you cannot save yourself from your sin; that there is nothing you can do to enter a relationship with God. It is realizing that God became a man, Jesus; and by dying and being raised to life made a way for us to be set free from sin so that we can enter a relationship with God -- the relationship He intended for us to have with Him all along. It is trusting that although saying "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" and being immersed in water do not save you, God will save you when you acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God and pledge your life to Him in the ceremony of immersion. It is committing yourself to God, even though you cannot understand how He can love you and forgive you and call you His child when you are so undeserving. Faith is not blind belief in the unreal, it is confident trust in the One Who has been doing the impossible from the beginning.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO BE A CHRISTIAN

I intended this to be express the seeming contradiction between the simplicity of Christianity and the impossibility of Christianity, but the problem is that precisely because Christianity is impossible, it is easy -- because you aren't accomplishing it, God is. So these articles aren't as contradictory as I'd hoped they would appear. So much for dramatic effect. One of the dangers of presenting the ease and availability of Christianity is the possible neglect of the cost of Christianity. Salvation is by faith, accomplished entirely by God on behalf of the one who is willing to accept it. But God demands that you count the cost before you take the gift. What is this cost that makes it so hard to be a Christian? Simply this: Every thing.

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-- yes, even his own life -- he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:25-27, NIV) God's salvation is not for those whose priorities are divided. He commands us to love Him so much that we would never consider placing anyone else in a place of greater importance than Him -- not even our own selves, our own lives. Our first impulse is to care for ourselves -- Maslow's hierarchy of needs only categorizes our selfishness. Jesus says that God's way is the unnatural action of denying oneself in devotion to God. "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'" (Luke 14:28-30, NIV) God's salvation isn't for those who are busy saving themselves by working hard and being religious and following all the rules. Those people will wind up short, their tower unfinished. Salvation is a gift, not wages. "O suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:31-33, NIV) Salvation is not gained by our efforts. Salvation is by faith, which means we must go to God and surrender everything to Him, recognizing that we do not have within us the ability to save ourselves. We surrender to Him everything. We can't hold anything back from Him. He warns us to count the cost before we ask for terms of peace with God. His price is total surrender, something few are willing to pay. When the people of Jesus' day realized how total a commitment God demands, they said, "Who then can be saved?" It's a good question today in an age where Canadians prefer to fragment their religion and pick and choose elements they want.