

“An Almost Christian”
(A rewrite/paraphrase of John Wesley’s sermon)

Halloween. My least favorite Americanized holiday is approaching. When we walk into stores or down streets, we see cobwebs, masks, ghosts, and monsters. I view the holiday as one of deception. Many people get excited about it. Most kids enjoy dressing up and getting candy. Many people will visit haunted houses and watch horror movies.

Today I want to introduce you to the most realistic horror story ever. The difference between this horror story and Hollywood’s is that this one is real. It is the story of the almost Christian.

Luke 13:23-30 (The Message)

²³⁻²⁵ *A bystander said, “Master, will only a few be saved?”*

He said, “Whether few or many is none of your business. Put your mind on your life with God. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires your total attention. A lot of you are going to assume that you’ll sit down to God’s salvation banquet just because you’ve been hanging around the neighborhood all your lives. Well, one day you’re going to be banging on the door, wanting to get in, but you’ll find the door locked and the Master saying, ‘Sorry, you’re not on my guest list.’

²⁶⁻²⁷ *“You’ll protest, ‘But we’ve known you all our lives!’ only to be interrupted with his abrupt, ‘Your kind of knowing can hardly be called knowing. You don’t know the first thing about me.’*

²⁸⁻³⁰ *“That’s when you’ll find yourselves out in the cold, strangers to grace. You’ll watch Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets march into God’s kingdom. You’ll watch outsiders stream in from east, west, north, and south and sit down at the table of God’s kingdom. And all the time you’ll be outside looking in—and wondering what happened. This is the Great Reversal: the last in line put at the head of the line, and the so-called first ending up last.”*

As it says in the scripture: have you been hanging round the neighborhood all your lives... only to find yourself not on the guest list?

Let's look at another story. Paul was being held in chains by the Romans and had asked to be seen by Caesar. At this point in the story, he is with Festus and King Agrippa. Paul is given the liberty of talking—telling his own story. He is witnessing to the governing rulers.

Acts 26:25-29

²⁵ *But he (Paul) said, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.*

²⁶ *For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.”*

²⁸ ***Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”***

²⁹ *And Paul said, “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.”*

King Agrippa at that moment was an almost Christian. He heard the truth but did not receive it for himself nor take it to heart. An almost Christian is the same as not being a Christian; not being saved. An old saying is: *almost* only counts in horseshoes.

Look at the world around us... in light of this scripture:

Matthew 24:37-42

³⁷ *“When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah’s day. ³⁸ In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. ³⁹ People didn’t realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes.*

⁴⁰ *“Two men will be working together in the field; one will be taken, the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken, the other left.*

⁴² *“So you, too, must keep watch! For you don’t know what day your Lord is coming.*

When the Son of Man returns, people will not be ready. People will please themselves as in the day of Noah. In light of this, think of the almost Christian, and some of the current trends:

Crosses have become a fashion item. We see them everywhere - jewelry, shirts, pants, bumper stickers, art and even tattoos. Do people display them for their beauty? Or for the fad? Or for their meaning? If you run into someone with a cross, does it mean the person is a Christian?

Growing up, my Grandma, who was born in 1902, would say, "Of course I'm a Christian! I was born in America!" Does the place of birth make one a Christian? What about the fact that many people born here, in America, are Muslim, Jewish or of other faiths?

Billy Sunday once said, “Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you an automobile.” Many people who attend church do believe they are Christian simply because they go to church.

Internet dating has also become common. Several sites are advertised as "Christian" and others have a place to mark religious preference. What makes a site Christian? Does marking "Christian" as the preference really mean anything? What is the definition they are using? Does that person's terms mean the same thing as the terms of the Holy Bible?

If we are just "hanging around the neighborhood" but not really a part, how do we know if we are saved or not? We need to ask ourselves, "What makes someone a Christian?" Most importantly, we need to ask, "Do I, personally, understand what it means to be Christian? Am I saved? Or am I an almost Christian?"

First, let's look at what it means to be "almost" a Christian?

Some of the best people in the world are almost Christian!

A. Many almost Christians will encourage tolerance, work for justice, fight for truth and act honestly. Almost Christians will often care for those around them.

Matthew 7:9-11

⁹ “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ **If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!**

B. Many almost Christians have a form of godliness

2 Timothy 3:1-5

¹ But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ **having a form of godliness but denying its power.** Have nothing to do with such people.

C. Sincerity. The dictionary defines sincerity as *honesty and genuineness*. Among almost Christians, the actions of belief are done out of tradition but without understanding.

Mark 7:5, 8-9

⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”

⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

⁹ And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!”

D. Almost Christians do not have a full understanding of who God is. When we do not know who God is, we can be easily deceived!

Ephesians 4:13-14

¹³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of **the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:** ¹⁴ That we henceforth be no more children, **tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;**

Mark 13:5-8, 21-27

⁵ Jesus replied, “Don’t let anyone mislead you, ⁶ for many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah.’ They will deceive many. ⁷ And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don’t panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won’t follow immediately. ⁸ Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in many

parts of the world, as well as famines. But this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come.

²¹ *“Then if anyone tells you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah,’ or ‘There he is,’ don’t believe it. ²² For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God’s chosen ones. ²³ Watch out! I have warned you about this ahead of time!*

²⁴ *“At that time, after the anguish of those days,*

the sun will be darkened,

the moon will give no light,

²⁵ *the stars will fall from the sky,*

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ *Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And he will send out his angels to gather his chosen ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.*

Some of the most fantastic almost Christians in the world will present themselves and their religion in the name of Christianity, but their doctrine does not line up with the most basic principles of Christianity. Two examples are:

1) The Doctrine of Works. Many almost Christians will believe they are saved because they do many good things. They are busy doing good works. Yet, we are not saved by works.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Titus 3:4-7 (NLT)

⁴ But—“When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, ⁵ he saved us, **not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.** He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. ⁶ He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. ⁷ Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.”

2) They operate with the wrong definition of God. Christians believe in the Trinity—one God, three persons. We do not worship three gods. Almost Christians will have an inaccurate understanding of who God is.

1 John 5:7-8

⁷ For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. ⁸ And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

Secondly, we'll look at what it means, as Paul put it, to be "Altogether Christian" or, in our case, to be fully Christian (instead of "almost").

A. Christians are saved by faith and not works.

Romans 10:9-10

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

B. Keep the basic commands that Jesus reminds us of: Love God with your whole heart, mind and soul AND love your neighbor as yourself.

Mark 12:33

³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

C. We will know who the Savior is... we will not just know OF him... but KNOW HIM.

1) We will know His voice!

John 10:3-5, 7-10

³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice."

⁷ so Jesus explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. ¹⁰ The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

2) We will study His word

2 Timothy 2:15

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2 Corinthians 4:2a

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.

3) We grow more daily!

Colossians 1:9b

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,

CONCLUSION:

There is a happy ending available for the horror story we started with! It's up to you whether you accept and receive that happy ending!

Ephesians 2:1-10 (NLT)

¹ Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ² You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. ³ All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

⁴ But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) ⁶ For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷ So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

What are you?

Are you an almost Christian? Are you unwilling to give your life to God? Do you believe you are good-enough, that you don't need God? Is going to church enough to be made free from a life of sin? Are you unsure of what you believe...so you end up believing everything and anything?

Or are you Christian, fully saved by grace? Have you committed your life to Christ? Are you walking in the grace and love that is yours today through Jesus Christ?

Now is the time of God's favor, NOW is the day of salvation. (2 Cor. 6:2b) We never know when we are going to be with God, face-to-face. We may see Him in heaven or be here when He comes; either way, are you ready? Or are you almost ready? The time is NOW for you to be sure of a happy ending. It takes a simple, heart-felt, sincere request of God.

Song: Days of Elijah <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWSATpx7uzk>

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