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What It Means Bo Be A Christian

By Everett Hardin

There are many different ideas as to what it means to be a Christian. Some people confess to be a Christian simply because their parents had water sprinkled on their heads when they were infants. Some think they are Christians even though they never assemble with the saints to worship God (Heb. 10:25). Some think they are Christians because they believe Jesus is the Son of God and still others think they can be saved without being a Christian.

Our nation is often called a “Christian” nation, even though Christians comprise only a tiny majority in the populace. The term Christian is used loosely in common speech. Since we are to “*speak as the oracles of God*” (I Pet. 4:11), we should find out how the New Testament uses the term “Christian.”

First we need to see what a Christian is **not**. Contrary to popular opinion, not all good moral people are Christians. Cornelius was a man of high morals (Acts 10:1,2,22), but Peter had to tell him how to be saved (Acts 11:13,14), implying that he was unsaved, thus not a Christian. Not even the godly characters of the Old Testament were Christians because “*the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch*” (Acts 11:26).

What then is a Christian? The New Testament word for “Christian” literally means “belonging to Christ.” It is a noun, not an adjective. The name applies to certain individuals, not a description of anything and everything that has religious overtones. A Christian is a “*disciple*” (learner of, follower) of Christ (Acts 11:26). These disciples are also “*saints*” (Acts 1:9; I Cor. 1:2), meaning one set apart from sin and reconciled to God. Since Paul’s persecution of the saints is also termed doing evil to the “*church*” (Acts 8:3). Christians are members of the Lord’s church, the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). “*Christian*” is the proper name of members of the church of Christ; “*Disciple*” describes their relationship to Christ; and “*saint*” shows their relationship to God.

Thus, a Christian bears certain spiritual relationships that other people do not have. To the body of Christ, he is a “*member*,” i.e. a part of the body (I Cor. 12:12,27). Since Christ has only one body that is an exalted privilege. To the family of God he is a “*child*” (Eph. 3:14-15; Gal. 3:26). Since God has no children outside His family, this is a signal honor. In relationship to the Kingdom of God, the Christian is a “*citizen*” (Col. 1:13; Eph. 2:19). There are only two kingdoms in the spiritual realm, one of Satan and one of God, and all responsible people are in one or the other. The Christian is a living stone in God’s temple (Eph. 2:19-22; I Pet. 2:5). This is the only realm where God will accept our worship and service.

Christians are not to be called by human religious names. The name “*Christian*” is of divine origin. Isaiah foretold, “*a new name which the mouth of the Lord shall name*” (Isa. 62:1,2). The name “*Christian*” was indeed a “*new name*,” being used for the first time in Antioch (Acts 11:26). This name was given “*by the mouth of the Lord*.” The term “*Christian*” honors the name of Christ, in whose name alone, salvation can be found (Acts 4:10-12). Thus Paul forbids us to wear secular names (I Cor. 1:10-13). Consider some things that being a Christian means.

To Obey God

A Pharisee asked Jesus, “*Master, which is the greatest commandment in the Law. Jesus said unto him, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*” (Matt. 22:36-37). Peter and the apostles had been commanded not to teach any more in the name of Jesus; they said, “*We ought to obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29). Christ is “*the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him*” (Heb. 5:9). Strict adherence to God’s will as the standard both in profession and conduct is a principle of discipleship. “*Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God, he that abideth in the doctrine hath both the Father and the Son*” (2 John 9).

To Follow Jesus

We read in I Pet. 2:24 that “*Christ suffered for us leaving us an example that we should follow His steps.*” The walk of Christ which we are to imitate is found in the religious, moral, and spiritual activities of His life on earth. One does not know God who does not conform to His will. As sheep we follow the good shepherd (John 10:27).

Live and Die for Christ

Paul said, “*Christ shall be magnified in my body whether it be by life or by death*” (Phil. 1:20). The Christian cannot cut himself off from Christ and live as he pleases. “*For none of us liveth to himself, and no one dies by himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die we are the Lord’s*” (Rom. 14:7-8). No Christian when he comes to die will regret that he has lived for Christ.

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus

“*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me*” (Matt. 16:24). In order to be a disciple of Jesus one must do two things, namely, “*deny himself*” and “*take up his cross*” and follow Him. Following Jesus involves the denial of self and enduring reproach and dishonor for His name. One should not consider bearing his cross a disgrace or shame. The disciples of Jesus must be humble and willing to submit, praying for strength to overcome. “*This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith*” (I John 5:4). One who loses heaven, loses all, no matter what he gains on earth (Matt. 16:26).

Be Humble As A Little Child

Our Lord said, “*Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 18:3). Peter tells us to be “*clothed with humility*” and to “*humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time*” (I Pet. 5:5-6). It is sheer folly for a man to resist God, the wise course is for one to humble himself under the Lord’s hand with the assurance that he will be exalted in due time.

To Hold Fast The Faith

Timothy was exhorted, “*hold fast the form of sound words, which you have heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim. 1:13). Titus was commanded to “*speak the things which become sound doctrine*” (Tit. 2:1). Both the speech and the conduct of the Christian should harmonize with the gospel of Christ. If one’s faith and love is what it ought to be, he will hold fast the form of sound words. In matters of religion there is no place for the substitution of human opinions.

Put The Kingdom of Christ First In Our Lives

The Sermon on the Mount is the greatest single statement of the Lord's moral and spiritual teaching on record. In this sermon Jesus teaches that the great objective of life is to "*seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*" (Matt. 6:33). Everything else must be made subordinate to that goal if the greatest good is to be realized. When things around the house are to be done, the kingdom comes first. When work or recreation interferes remember the words of Christ. To be successful in any undertaking man must have something which he considers of the highest importance (Phil. 3:12-14). To seek the kingdom is for one to bring himself into complete harmony with the divine will (Matt. 7:21-23). Our lives must be centered around the church and faithfulness to the bible.

When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we will be parted either to the right hand or to the left, according to our works (2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 25:31-33). What will matter then will be whether or not we have obeyed God while in this life, "not that my new car has a scratch," or "that company came from out of town," or "I've got a headache." What we want to hear is "*Well done thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter into the joy of the Lord*" (Matt. 25:21).

If you are not a Christian you can become one simply by being saved by the gospel (Rom. 1:16). If you will hear the word (Rom. 10:17), believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Rom. 10:10), confess your faith in Christ, repent of your sins (Acts 2:38), and be baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27), you will be a Christian.

A Christian is simply a disciple of Christ. If you are a Christian strive always to live worthy of the name (Eph. 4:1), If you are not a Christian, you need to become one, for only in Christ is salvation found (2 Tim. 2:10). Are **you** a Christian?
