

Are You A Christian?

"Christian." It is a name or title that so many people want to wear in our modern day world. Saying that you are a Christian according to the world today though carries with it so few obligations. If you believe in God, you're a Christian. If you attend a "church" once in a while, you're a Christian. If you own a Bible and read it, then you're a Christian. So many want this title because of the reward that comes with living a faithful Christian life, which is an eternal spiritual life with God in heaven.

When we look to find out more about this subject of the term "Christian," I am not going to get books dealing with theology, nor a modern dictionary to find the meaning, or the thousands of other "faith based" books that are on the shelves of any major bookstore. Joel Osteen may have sold millions of copies of his book, "Your Best Life Now," but that is not where we will go to find out how to be a Christian. The book that defines a Christian is one that is thousands of years old and has been written by many different writers, what we know as the Bible and what they knew as the scriptures. For only there can we find "*all things that pertain to life and godliness*" (2 Peter 1:3).

The term "Christian" only appears one time in the scriptures (Acts 11:26), and has reference to the group of disciples that were at Antioch. The actual meaning of the word is simply, follower of Christ. From here we can gather much about the characteristics of a Christian. We know that those who were Christians were also disciples. The word disciple literally means "a learner". The word is used to describe different disciples in scripture. First, you have the disciples of Christ (Matthew 9:19), and secondly the disciples of John the Baptist (Matthew 9:14; Acts 19:1-3). Both were learners of their respective teachers.

When a person claims that they believe in God, they justify that as being a Christian. This way of thinking has stemmed from the root of the phrase, "All you have to do is believe," and is a popular teaching among Protestant "churches" today. However, does just believing in God make you a Christian? When you say you believe in God, how do you know which one you believe in? Paul said, "*as there are many gods and many lords*" (1 Corinthians 8:5). It may be true that you believe in a god, but you don't believe in the one true God, because you have not read about Him in the scriptures. Remember, this is for those who say that all you have to do is believe, James wrote, "*You believe in one God, you do well, even the demons believe, and tremble*" (James 2:19)! Are the demons Christians? No, because they believed in God's existence, but were not disciples of Him. The scriptures show that it takes more than just believing in God to become a Christian.

We have also people "*calling on the name of the Lord,*" after which the Lord Himself does a work in their lives, and they now live for the Lord. Are people of this stripe Christians? We know that Peter quoted Joel in Acts 2:21: "*and it shall come to pass, that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" So the scriptures state that "*calling on the name of the Lord*" DOES save you. But how do we do that? Some might say, just utter vocally "Lord, Lord," and that's calling on the name of the Lord. However Jesus says, "*But why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say*" (Luke 6:46)? So, WE must DO what the Lord says to call on the name of the Lord. It is not that HE does the WORK in us. Jesus also says, "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness'*" (Matt. 7:21-23). So then these that had "*called on the name of the Lord*" practiced lawlessness, which is sin. They were not saved, nor were they Christians. This is obviously is not what is meant by "*calling on the name of the Lord.*" The Lord said we need to DO the will of His Father. We know that the will of the Father is the words that Jesus spoke (John 12:48-50). It is then revealed to us in scripture how we are to "*call upon the name of the Lord.*" In Acts 22:16, Ananias has revealed to Saul the Lord Jesus, but then tells him to "*arise, and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" So, now we have revealed to us HOW one can "*call on the name of the Lord,*" through baptism into Christ (Galatians 3:27).

We also know that these Christians at Antioch were also called, the church. The word church literally means, "the called out body," and has reference to the people who believed in Christ AND obeyed His will for the forgiveness of their sins. In short they were "called out of sin." This is something that all these disciples had in common; they had salvation in Jesus Christ. But, there are those today who make the claim that you don't have to be a part of a church to be saved. You can be a "Christian," yet not be a part of the church. It is interesting though, how that teaching directly goes against what is taught by God!!! For we know that the church IS the saved (Acts 2:47)! It is true you don't have to be a part of the church, but don't expect eternal life with God if you're not.

When looking at the scriptures, there are five components that are said to save our souls. All of them are vital, and one cannot receive salvation with only part of them. There is a definite need for all of them. In Romans we are told one needs to hear the word of God, for this produces faith (Romans 10:17). Peter told those on Pentecost to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38).

We also learn from Romans 10:9 that if we believe and confess we will be saved. Therefore, in total if we hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized, we will have salvation in Christ Jesus, and as a saved soul, Christ will add us to His church (Acts 2:47), and we will become disciples of Him, also known as a Christian.

God's definition of a Christian is one that is a follower of Christ, believes in His word, after which they obey the acts Christ set forth to receive salvation, and in doing so become a part of the church. Only after this can one make the claim that they are a Christian. It is one who obeys daily Christ and His word.

With that, we end with the question, are you a Christian? Have you followed the definition God has set forth to become a Christian? Just as there is only "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*" (Ephesians 4:5), there is only one word of God, and just one definition of Christian. If you are not a Christian, we hope that you will submit to the Lord's will, before it is everlastingly too late!

Scott Vanderwood