

4 Marks of True Christianity

Introduction. In C.S. Lewis' book, *Mere Christianity* Lewis mentions how the word "gentleman" originally referred to a property owner and had nothing to do with character. But over time, that changed.

I make the same argument with the word "Christianity." Think for a moment about meeting a stranger in a public place other than a church building. In the course of your conversation, this stranger, with no real context, declares, "I'm a Christian." What do you know about this person? In the days of Paul, if one described himself as a Christian, one would know he was a baptized believer in Christ who embraced all of the teachings of Christ and followed all of them.

Because of the persecution of the church at Jerusalem, saints went everywhere preaching the gospel. When they reached Antioch "a great number believed and turned to the Lord." News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas who sought to encourage them with purpose of heart to continue. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul (later called Paul) and brought him to Antioch. This is where the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

This is the first of three times the Greek word that's translated "Christian" is found in our Bibles (cp. Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Of course, from the word "Christian" we get "Christianity."

Did you notice that Acts 11:26 described Christians as disciples (Matthew 28:18-20)? This means someone who's baptized in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and who's taught and accepts all things commanded by the Lord.

This just isn't the way our world uses "Christian" and "Christianity." And that's the main point of the lesson. You may have been deceived as to what true Christianity is. If so, we're going to lay out four areas where those claiming "Christianity" actually fall well short of what true Christianity is according to the New Testament. I hope to persuade you to be a Christian, not according to the feelings and "I think" of men today, but according to the teachings of the New Testament.

I. Understanding the Nature of Jesus Christ

- A. Jesus is Lord and Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 4:3; 26:63-64a). And to say, "Son of God" was to be equal to God (John 5:16-18).
 1. In the beginning of the New Testament, it was prophesied and confirmed in Matthew 1:22-23 that Jesus was Immanuel ("God with us").
 2. After Jesus ascended, the apostles preached and the people recognized who Jesus was (Acts 2:36; 8:37). This was a foundational truth!
 - a) However, a part of "Christianity" denies some of these truths.
 - b) Jehovah's Witnesses describe themselves as a part of Christianity but deny Jesus was God. Their New World Translation even says Jesus was "a god" in John 1:1.
 3. In Revelation, the designation "First and the Last" is used for Jesus (Revelation 1:11, 17; 2:8; 22:13). It's the same way God the Father is described in the Old Testament (Isaiah 44:6; 48:12).

- B. Shockingly, Newsweek, in its August 30, 2020 edition showed a survey that suggested nearly 1/3 (30%) of “evangelicals” agree that Jesus isn’t God. Closer to half (44%) of those who agree that Jesus was simultaneously man and God say Jesus committed sins like any other mortal being (Hebrews 4:15).
 - 1. How can someone be a Christian in the New Testament sense of the word when and not believe Jesus is God or Lord?
 - 2. I’m not sure you could find any quote where anyone professing Christianity just flat out denies Jesus as Lord, but they do so by action (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46).
 - 3. Our attitude should be just like Mary’s in John 2:5 (“Whatever He says to you, do it”) and Peter’s in Luke 5:5 (“Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net”).
- C. Luke uses a specific word seven times in his gospel (5:5; 8:24 [twice], 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13).
 - 1. In our English versions it’s translated as “Master.” It’s a special word meaning master in charge or one who has the right to give orders.
 - 2. We listen to Jesus, not because He’s the perfect, compassionate, meek Master Teacher, but because He’s the one with all authority (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 3:17). If you want to uphold Him as your Master, then you’d better live like it (Ephesians 4:17, 20-24, 30).

II. Respecting the Word of God

- A. The psalmist exclaimed that the sum or entirety of God’s Word is truth (Psalm 119:160). That means that there’s not any of it that’s not important for our well-being and salvation.
- B. God has now spoken to us through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2; cp. John 14:6), and He speaks God’s Word, which accomplishes our sanctification (John 17:17) and will judge us (John 12:48).
- C. Despite such plain statements, many who claim to be a part of Christianity deny, change, or ignore His truth, which can be summed up as revealed facts and moral teachings.
 - 1. As an example, many who call themselves Christians today deny the resurrection.
 - a) One survey said, “Of people who attend church services one or two times a month, 11% deny the resurrection. And of those who attend church services less than 1 or 2 times a month, almost half disbelieve in the resurrection of Jesus.”
 - b) How can a Christian not believe in the resurrection (Romans 10:8-9)?
 - 2. Another example is how Christians are capitulating on plain moral teaching (Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 6:9).
 - a) Since Jesus gave His instructions, Christians have been ignoring God’s teaching about divorce and remarriage.
 - b) Furthermore, there’s so many Christians today suggesting that homosexuality is right or that there’s really nothing wrong with transgenderism.

- D. Before I leave this point, it would be natural to talk about the ways we establish authority, but I want to speak to the younger generations for a moment.
 - 1. On social media, a lot of Bible believers are subjected to what I'll call "Meme Theology." These are quick assessments of Bible teaching that can have some accuracy to them.
 - 2. However, you must understand that complex issues in God's Word can rarely be boiled down to funny memes. So don't be fooled into believing an inaccuracy or giving up your faith because someone thinks a meme does a good job teaching God's Word.

III. Worshiping in the New Testament Church

- A. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity estimates that there are more than 200 Christian denominations in the U.S. and a staggering 45,000 globally (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; Ephesians 4:4).
- B. The Scriptures do talk about "churches" (Romans 16:16; Revelation 1:4). These references speak of the saved in a given locality (1 Corinthians 1:2).
- C. A large part of the reason churches exist is to direct people in worship to God. We learn three important aspects of worship which please God from the famous statement in John 4:23-24:
 - 1. God-pleasing worship must be absolute (Matthew 4:10; Revelation 22:9). Ironically, some may go to church and actually be worshiping their church or denominational dogma instead of Him who commands them to assemble for worship.
 - 2. God-pleasing worship must be accurate.
 - a) The concept of "truth" today has fallen into disrepute. People speak of "my truth" or "your truth." But Jesus affirmed God's Word is truth (John 17:17). When we worship in truth we worship what God has revealed in Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 - b) The book of Acts and the letters written to churches reveal five expressions of worship in which New Testament Christians participated:
 - (1) They ate the Lord's Supper (communion) every Sunday (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34).
 - (2) They praised God by singing without instruments (Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12).
 - (3) They contributed financially to support Christ's cause (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7).
 - (4) They preached the Word of God (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 2 Timothy 4:1-2).
 - (5) They prayed to God (Acts 2:42; 4:23-41).
 - 3. God-pleasing worship must be authentic. When we worship "in spirit" we pour our heart, soul, passion, or emotion into our worship. It's possible for worship to be accurate, but lack authenticity — to be spiritless, ritualistic, and rote. It's going through the motions with little or no emotion. If we're going to worship in Spirit, we must develop the spirit of worship.

- D. If your worship isn't absolute, open your eyes and refocus on God. If your worship isn't accurate, open your Bible and follow the truth. If your worship isn't authentic, open your heart and put the right feeling into worship.

IV. *Believing in God's Plan of Salvation*

- A. The plan of salvation has long been a divisive issue between “Christianity” and the true divine will of God.
- B. There's so many directions we could go in discussing this specific issue, but only a handful will make the point:
1. The Catholic Church tells us that mankind was born in Original Sin so babies need to be sprinkled to remove that ancient stain.
 2. Denominational groups tell us that grace alone or faith alone will save us (cp. Ephesians 2:8).
 - a) This is underscored by appeals to say the “sinner's prayer” for salvation.
 - b) An example of the prayer is this: “Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior.”
- C. How did people come to God in the New Testament?
1. They heard gospel preaching (Acts 8:12).
 2. They believed the message that was proclaimed (Ephesians 1:13).
 3. They confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (1 John 4:15).
 4. They repented of their sins (Luke 15:17-20a).
 5. They were baptized into Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:27).
 6. They lived righteous lives (Hebrews 10:23).

Conclusion. We need to guard the faith and contend for the faith once for delivered (1 Timothy 6:20; Jude 3). The “faith” is inspired and is able to make us perfect or complete.

Since the day of Pentecost, Christians have been saved — only those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and the Son of God, who are baptized into Christ, and rise up to walk in the newness of life. These are the ones are added to Jesus' church by Him, and who accept and obey His word as truth — saved by grace through the blood of Jesus by the forgiveness of their sins.

I am deeply indebted to Harold Hancock for the use of his material.