

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

It is commonly thought that anyone claiming to follow the teachings of Jesus is a Christian. However, Jesus Himself asked, ". . . why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). When evaluated technically, using the Bible as the standard, we discover that not every person or organization claiming to be Christian actually is.

Surprisingly, the word "Christian" is found only three times in the Bible. Christ's disciples were first called Christians, and this by their opponents, in the city of Antioch (Acts 11:26). Typically, they were "**preaching** the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20), a precise term meaning to proclaim the gospel. The Christian gospel is elsewhere defined as the message that Christ died, was buried, and rose again to save sinners (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Many in Antioch "believed, and turned unto the Lord" (Acts 11:21). Therefore, true Christianity must declare, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. . ." (Acts 16:31). In addition, a prominent theme of first century Christianity was "the grace of God" (Acts 11:23). Adherence to salvation by grace, not of works, is a sure mark of a genuine Christian. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

In a dramatic appearance before a government official named Agrippa, the Apostle Paul explained how he had become a follower of Christ. As Paul ended his presentation, Agrippa exclaimed, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28). Being a Christian, in the context of Paul's speech, consists of receiving "forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith. . ." (verse 18). Any individual or "church" which does not embrace faith in Christ as the only means of forgiveness cannot be genuinely Christian. "To him [Christ] give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

The book of 1 Peter was written to help the believer "suffer as a Christian" (4:16). Here a Christian is one who is confident about the salvation of his soul (1:9), bases his redemption solely on the blood of Christ, (1:18,19), and has been born again (1:23). He believes that Christ died on the cross for sinners (2:24) and that Christ, not self effort, brings us to God (3:18). Because the Christian knows he owes his eternal life entirely to the Lord, he gives all the glory to God rather than seek his own (4:16).

It is a serious charge to suggest that someone or something is not Christian. It is even more grave when the charge is true. Let us mark well the words of Christ, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

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