



## “I’m a Christian, Too!”

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Have you ever been party to a discussion in which one person questioned whether or not another was a Christian? Perhaps you were the one who was questioned. It’s not very complimentary, is it? Here you are, doing your best to live by the highest standard you know – endeavoring above all else to please God and live so as to be permitted into Heaven at the end of the road – and somebody else comes along and says that you are not even a Christian. What can a person do under such circumstances? Should one person who thinks that he’s a Christian say that another with the same conviction is not a Christian? Is it “judging” to make such a statement? Isn’t judging wrong?

I grew up hearing the statement from people in various denominations, “We’re all going to Heaven; we’re just taking different routes to get there.” In the Navy I was denied the privilege of listing my religion as “Christian” because, as the personnel director told me, “All people are Christians who were born after Christ.” For several years my family and I were missionaries in a country that formerly had an official policy of atheism. We knew many who were still professing atheists. I often heard it said there that everyone who is not an atheist is a Christian.

Which of these statements is true? Is any of them true. How can we know for sure? If we stop any 10 people at random on practically any street in the world and asked, “What is a Christian?” we would probably receive at least five or six different answers – maybe ten. Almost everybody knows the word, but there is confusion over the meaning of it.

Dictionaries don’t help much. The first dictionary I checked gave as definition of the word “Christian”: “a person who believes in Christ.” The second gave, “one who professes belief in the teachings of Christ.” To many people those definitions my sound equivalent, but they are not. To believe in the person called Christ is not the same thing as to believe in His teachings. Then too, what about that phrase, “professes to believe”? Is it enough to make an outward statement of belief, or is an inward conviction required? A priest of the Russian Orthodox Church told an acquaintance of mine that our outward actions constitute our true faith (i.e. it’s enough just to do the right things religiously). Most so-called “fundamentalists” would strongly disagree (i.e. teaching that a sincere and righteous heart is the true measure of faith).

Even Bible dictionaries don’t solve the problem. The first one on my shelf says that a Christian is “a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The second says, “the followers of Christ were so-called at the first in Antioch.”

Where can a person turn for answers to these questions? Are we really left to grope in the confusion of man’s answers until we find one that seems good to us, and then adopt that one answer as our own? What is a Christian? Is it possible to know who is a Christian, and therefore, who is not?

Most of the world is aware of the existence of the Bible but, again, there are many conflicting ideas as to what the Bible is, where it came from, and how it is to be used in the world today. Teachers I heard in my youth were confident that “the Bible worked well enough in the past, but we have to modify it’s rules for today’s world.” Others say that the Bible must be interpreted and followed literally. Some say that the Bible is God-sent; others are sure that it is the product of human thinking.

One of the most important principles of human communication is that of defining the terms we use when we speak or write. Communication is complete only when the hearer or reader attaches the same definition to a word or phrase as the speaker or writer intended. This principle is just as important when considering the Bible. If a listener in a normal human conversation hears something he doesn’t understand – or something that he knows is capable of various meanings – he usually asks the speaker to define his terms. We can do the same thing when reading the Bible.

Just as we should let a human speaker tell us what he means by the word he uses, so we should let God define the terms he uses. The apostle Paul wrote, “God is not the author of confusion” (I Cor. 14:33). God gave us the Bible word-for-word as He wanted it to be written (I Cor. 2:11-13; II Peter 1:21). He did not give us a confusing book, and then sit back and say, “OK, you’re on your own to find the meaning.” He gave the world “everything that pertains to life and godliness” (II

Peter 1:3) and he made it understandable (Eph. 3:4). And He intended that all should “understand” it in exactly the same way (I Cor. 1:10; John 17:20-21).

As much as we hear the word “Christian” in the world one might think that it occurs on every page of the Bible – or at least of the New Testament. It doesn’t. The word occurs only three times in all of scripture.

In Acts 11:26 we are told that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” This is in fulfillment of God’s prophecy in Isaiah (56:5; 62:2; 65:15) to give a new name to His people. Whereas the Jews were God’s people at the time Isaiah lived and wrote, that circumstance would change. It would change in the house of God (the church – I Tim. 3:15), after the Gentiles were included among the faithful (see Acts 11:19-21). The name would be given by God and would be an everlasting name. Notice that in Acts 11:26 it is the “disciples” who were called “Christians.” Now, if we can define the word “disciple” we will have a definition also for Christian, for the two names are given to the same people. In John 8:31 Jesus said, “If you continue in my word, you are my disciples indeed.” In John 13:35 He said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples: if you have love one to another.” In John 15:8 He said, “Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” The Greek word translated “disciple” means “learner, pupil.” So, a disciple is one who learns from Jesus how to live in this world (bear much fruit) and love others – and he continues living according to the teaching of Jesus. This is the description of a disciple – of a Christian. It must be learned from the teaching of Jesus what “fruit” must be borne. That involves a careful study of the entire New Testament (John 14:26; 16:13 – spoken to the apostles, thus declaring that what they wrote is the word of Christ). Also, we observe that to “continue in my word” means to believe and obey “all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20), “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

In Acts 26:28 King “Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian.’” How had Paul done that? He had preached the resurrection of Christ (v. 23) and repentance from sin (v. 20). That is a definition of preaching the gospel (I Cor. 15:1-4) by which sins are forgiven (Luke 24:47; Rom. 1:16). One becomes a Christian by hearing and obeying the gospel (Rom. 10:16). The gospel includes both facts to be believed (i.e. I Cor. 15:1-4) and commands to be obeyed. In order to become a Christian (i.e. to be saved), one must:

**believe that Jesus is the Son of God** (John 20:30-31; 8:24 – but that’s not the only requirement Jesus gives),  
**repent from sin** (Luke 13:3, 5 – but that’s not the only requirement Jesus gives),  
**confess faith in Jesus Christ** as the Son of God (I Tim. 6:12; Acts 8:37 – but that’s not the only requirement Jesus gives),  
and **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-7).

This is God’s only plan for man’s salvation. Though many want to stop with one or two steps, God has said that all four are required. All who have obeyed this plan are Christians; none who have not obeyed it are Christians. That’s God’s word on the matter, not mine.

In I Peter 4:16 the apostle wrote, “if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.” Sometimes people suffer because they are Christians. The source of the suffering might be people who don’t want to be known as Christians (as in the case of those about whom Peter was writing), or it might be others who say that they are Christians (Rev. 2:2-3). But notice that the person to whom Peter writes was a “Christian” in the eyes of God, not just by his own claim. A Christian is not ashamed of the name he wears. After all, it was given by God (Isa. 56:5, etc.). Being truly a Christian, and thus not guilty of anything worthy of the persecution that suffers, he glorifies God by patiently enduring the suffering as Christ endured the cross.

There will no doubt always be those in the world who support the idea of denominationalism with its various names, organizations, practices and doctrines. God’s word, however will always say, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all” (Eph 4:4-6). There is “one faith” recognized by the “one Lord,” but man still maintains his defenses for “many faiths” and thinks that through these all people can be heirs of the “one hope.”

Acts 2:47 says that “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” They were saved, of course, by that one and only plan that can save man (vv. 38-41), but to which church were they added? It was “the Lord” who added people. To whose church would He add them? There are many churches in the world today, bearing the names of many different men, women, doctrines and practices. Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). How can people believe that the churches built by Ellen G. White, John Calvin, Charles Wesley, Joseph Smith, Joseph Rutherford and others are each

distinct and unique, and at the same time believe that the church built by Jesus Christ includes all of these? But many do. White would be offended to be told that her church was a companion to Calvin's. Smith would strongly oppose the idea that his church was equal to Rutherford's. Yet multitudes think nothing at all of polluting Christ's own church by saying that all the others are parts of His one church. Wesley built his church, and Smith built his church. They are distinct and distinguishable one from another. Christ built His church, and it is distinguishable from all others just as surely as each of them is distinguishable from the others.

Jude, the half-brother of Jesus (Jude 1; Mark 6:3), wrote to Christians that they should "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (v. 3). It is one faith for all people of all time. It was once delivered and ever since has been taught in the world. It is the only faith that saves (Eph. 2:8; 4:5). All the saved are put by the Lord Himself into His one church (Acts 2:47; Eph. 4:4). The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of one church (Eph. 5:23), His church, the only church that will be saved (Eph. 5:26-27).

Jesus warned against making false judgments (Luke 6:37), but also instructed his disciples – Christians – to make righteous judgment (John 7:24). He said, "by their fruits you shall know them" (Matt. 7:16, 20). Whether or not a person is a Christian is not an arguable matter; it is a matter of comparing the facts of that person's life with the true word of God (John 17:17). Just as surely as we can measure a table with a yard stick or the temperature with a thermometer, so we can know "the whole counsel of God" on any subject by checking the measuring device He gave to us: the Bible. The person who is truly a Christian as God defines the word may be smug or self-righteous about his position. If so, he is unfaithful to the Lord; he needs to repent. The person who does not meet the Lord's definition of a Christian may be angry with the one who tells him so – but the message will remain the same nevertheless.

If you are not living as a faithful Christian, you are still in your sins (John 9:39-41). The invitation of Christ (Matt. 11:28-30) is always open to you (II Peter 3:9) while you live. Repent today before it is eternally too late, and let the Lord add you to His fellowship.

*for Confirming the Churches*  
strengthening smaller churches in difficult situations