

What Is A Christian?

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In the title we asked the question, “What is a Christian?” Many people can easily give the definition of this word (Christ-like). Nevertheless, it is important for us to ask this question because it is easy to forget what it truly means to BE a Christian. As the Holy Spirit saw fit to stir Christians up by way of reminder in 2 Peter (1:15; 3:1), so we need to be stirred up from time to time to make sure we remember the commitments we made when we became Christians.

To answer this question we are not going to specify every characteristic and every item that a Christian is expected to do. Rather, we will look at the words used to describe Christians in the New Testament. When we look at all of these words we will gain a picture of the overall responsibility we have as Christians.

Believer

Most essential element in the life of a Christian is faith. *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him...”* (Heb. 11:6). When one believes in God, in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the power of the gospel to save then they have the potential to become a Christian. *“He who believes and is Baptized will be saved”* (Mark 16:16). Faith is so important in fact that in the New Testament Christians were called believers before they were ever called Christian. *“And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women”* (Acts 5:14). Faith is the first element in person’s Christian walk. It is what one must have before he can have salvation. It is the foundation upon which all else is built. *“...give all diligence, add to your faith...”* (2 Pet. 1:5). But the faith that fills a true believer in Christ is not as the world sees it.

Many people would prefer to stop at this point and not learn about the rest of what God has to say about the Christian. But God shows us that there is much more to being a Christian than faith alone. For the faith described in the scriptures is an active, diligent and working faith. It is not a faith that can do nothing. Rather, as James point out in James 2:14-26, Christians are those whose faith is perfected by their works. Now this brings us to our second definition of what a Christian is.

Disciple

In Mark’s account of the Great Commission he recorded Jesus as saying, *“He who believes and is baptized shall be saved”* (Mark 16:16). In Matthew’s account Jesus gives us a fuller understanding of this in that He says, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...”* (Matt. 28:19). What we find is that as one “believes and is baptized” that person becomes a disciple of Christ. A disciple is literally a learner or follower. Thus, when a person is baptized they make a commitment to learn from Jesus and to follow Him. This is why Jesus included in the Great Commission the command, *“teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...”* (Matt. 28:20). This is why it is so important for Christians to spend much time in studying their Bibles and working with one another to do good works and being diligent in the work of the church. Because if we are not doing these things then we are not following in the footsteps of Christ (1 John 2:6).

Jesus came to this earth to do the will of the Father, and if we are not making it our life’s purpose to do the same then we cannot call ourselves disciples of Christ. A true disciple is one who diligently seeks the teachings of Christ, obeys all of His commands, and does the works given him to do.

This now brings us to yet another definition of a Christian.

Servant of God

We who have obeyed the gospel and committed ourselves to following Christ have been purchased by His blood. When He died on the cross He became a ransom, shedding His blood so that we may have life. That being the case, when we obey His gospel we are making a commitment to give our lives to Him as He gave His for us. *“And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again”* (2 Cor. 5:15). Now, this is not a bad thing, rather it is very redeeming. For outside of Christ we are slaves of sin. Not only do we serve sin with our every thought and every action, but we are also under bondage to sin. It is because of sin that the world is going to be destroyed. Those who are not in Christ will be eternally condemned. But thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus we have been bought and saved from that terrible outcome. But that does not mean we are free to do what ever we want. For just as sin was our master in the world, now that we are in Christ, having been purchased by His blood we have become servants of God, committed to serving Him in righteousness. *“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace”* (Rom. 6:12-14). *“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 6:20-23).

Child of God

As mentioned, this is not a bad thing, but it is very redeeming. For we serve God, but in doing so we are also living as His Children. For just as the blood of Christ frees us from sin, it also purifies us. We become clean and holy, new creatures. Jesus describes this as being born again in John 3:3, 7. But if we are born again, then who is our Father? God! Therefore Paul wrote in Gal. 3:26-27, *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*

Here again, though we are privileged to be children of God, that privilege comes with responsibility. For the one whom we imitate is our Father. If we want to be children of God then we must imitate Him. *“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children”* (Eph. 5:1). On the other hand, if we choose not to imitate God, but to continue in our sins and put our own lusts and desires ahead of the word of God in our lives, then God will not be our Father. Rather, *“Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God”* (1 John 3:7-9).

As children of God we are special to Him. Sanctified and holy. That being the case, our relationship to God also has another aspect to it.

Temple of the Lord

In the Old Testament the temple was where God made His presence known on the earth. But there is no temple today. Why? Because God makes His presence known through His people. Therefore we are told that as the church we are the temple of God in 1 Cor. 3:16. In 1 Cor. 6:19 we are told that individually our bodies are temples of God.

If a person is not glorifying God, how can he call himself the temple of God? If he is not making God's presence known to the world then how can he say that God dwells in him? Therefore Paul commanded us, "*For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*" (1 Cor. 6:20). In order for us to be living as Christians we need to be keeping ourselves pure and doing the works of God so that we may make His presence known on the earth. If our neighbors do not see God and Christ in us, then how can we call ourselves Christians?

Saint or Faithful one

Now we come to our final description of what it means to be a Christian. Each of the terms we looked at show a different aspect of the Christian's relationship to God. This final word holds all of those things together. It does so because it is a word that describes someone who takes all of the things God says he is to be and is faithful to fulfill all of those things in his life. That word is "saint."

Contrary to some doctrines among the denomination, a saint is not a person of legend or a person who performs miracles or anything like that. In the scriptures the word saint is applied to all of God's people; His faithful ones. In fact, that is its meaning, "faithful ones."

This name combines all of the other descriptions because it means that we are faithful in all that God has given us to do. We are full of faith in Him, and we are faithful to obey Him.

There will be many people when Christ comes who truly believed in Him. There will be many people who thought that they had done many things in His name as His disciples. But as Jesus pointed out in Matt. 7:21, only those who are faithful to obey all that God commanded will be able to enter the kingdom. "*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'*" (Matt. 7:21). "*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (Rev. 2:10). This is a saint. This can be you and me if we are willing to fulfill the commitment that we made when we obeyed the gospel.

Conclusion

What about you? Are you a Christian? As we have seen the blessings and privileges of being a Christians far out weigh the passing pleasures of living in the world. If you would like the hope of salvation then you can begin seeking it today.

If you are a Christian you need to ask yourselves this question, have I been fulfilling my role as a Christian? Have and been doing all of the things described in this lesson? If not, you need to repent. You still have time, but it is short. If you still desire salvation then remember your commitment and start serving the Lord as His disciple, as His saint.