

What is a Christian?

What is a Christian? Many people claim to be Christians. Seventy-five percent of the U.S. and Canada claim “Christianity” as their religion. Thirty-three percent of the world claims “Christianity” as their religion. However, claiming Christianity as your religious affiliation does not make you a Christian. Even being saved does not make you a Christian. You read correctly- a person can be saved by God’s grace and not be a Christian. You will understand in this article what it takes to be a Christian.

“Christian” may be the most misused word in the world except for “love.” Sinners claim to be Christians. Murderers claim to be Christians. Thieves claim to be Christians. Go to the local jail and walk cell-to-cell, and see if most of the inmates don’t tell you they are Christians! No, they are **not** Christians. Christ never cut anyone’s head off nor raped a child nor robbed an elderly person nor smoked dope nor wrote worthless checks.

Let us “ask the Bible” what a Christian is:

First Christians

Acts 11:26 reads “*And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*” The early church in the days of the Apostles moved from Jerusalem to Antioch to escape persecution. Jerusalem was an intolerable place for the early church because Jerusalem was so religious. The religion of Judaism, centered in Jerusalem, hated, captured, maimed and killed folk who professed belief in Jesus Christ. To believe in God was okay- just don’t profess belief in Jesus Christ. By the way, religion around the world still hates, robs, maims, flies planes into buildings, and bombs folk in the market place who profess Christ. Thank God to live in America where believers are protected.

As the believers in Jesus Christ, the church, descended upon the city of Antioch, the “locals” began to observe them. As they observed the daily walk of these believers, they noticed something- they acted

like Christ! The residents of Antioch had heard about a man named “Christ.” They had heard of His good deeds such as healing the sick. They had heard of His kindness such as feeding the hungry. These newcomers to town “acted like Christ.” So, they began to call them “Christians.”

Note- the believers never called themselves Christians. The believers were called “Christians” by those who observed them. I provide this illustration, which is a true story: A man in the Marble, North Carolina community was assembled before the elders of the church one Sunday afternoon to be “ordained” as a deacon. The board of inquiry began their questioning of this man to confirm his faith. The first question asked was “Sir, are you a Christian?” The man replied “I don’t know. You will have to ask my neighbors.” The audience was shocked. However, after a moment of silence, all came to the conclusion the man was correct and honest. You see, if you want to know if I am a Christian, don’t ask me- ask my *neighbors*. Christians don’t call themselves Christians. If I want to know if you are a Christian, I will ask your neighbor or the people you work with on your job or the children your classmates at school.

You may wear a label pin that reads “Christian.” You may have a sign on your car that reads “Christian.” Those things are fine. However, they do not determine whether or not you are a Christian. Fellow man makes this determination for you after they observe your life in action. Again I stress- you can be saved by God’s grace having made a profession of faith in him and still not be a Christian. CHRISTIANS ARE SAVED PEOPLE WHO GO A STEP FURTHER AND ACT LIKE CHRIST. A Christian gives water to a thirsty man. A Christian gives food to a hungry man. A Christian who has two coats gives one to a cold man who has no coat. A Christian SPEAKS like Christ refraining from angry, hateful words. A Christian loves sinners like Christ did. A Christian loves the CHURCH like Christ did. A Christian loves other Christians.

What is a Christian?

Acts 26:1-28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: 2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: 3 Especially because I know thee to be

expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. 4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; 5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. 6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: 7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. 8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? 9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. 11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. 12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. 14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. 15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. 16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; 17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, 18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. 19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: 20 But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. 21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. 22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying

none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: 23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. 24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. 25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. 26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. 28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

In verse 2 thru 23 of the above passage of Acts Chapter 26, Apostle Paul is speaking. King Agrippa is listening to him speak as are others. When Paul finished speaking, King Agrippa has one thing to say: verse 28 “*Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a **Christian**.*” Agrippa was a sinner, a heathen King. But after hearing Paul describe what a Christian was, he decided he “almost” wanted to be one. So, let us examine this passage to see what description Paul gave for “what is a Christian. Where else could we look in God’s Word to find a better description of what makes a Christian?

- *Must have salvation experience*

Most of the scripture recorded above from Acts 26 is Paul’s account of the day he got saved on the road to Damascus. You are not a Christian because your father was one. You are not a Christian because you are a church member. You are not a Christian because you have been baptized. The first step in becoming a Christian to have a *salvation experience*. Have you been saved? Have you ever bowed your heart before God and asked forgiveness for your sin and asked Jesus to come into your heart as Savior? Do you recall such a time in your life? If not, you are not saved, and you sure cannot call yourself a Christian. I was saved at approximately 12:00 noon April 11, 1965 at First Bible Baptist Church in Athens, Tennessee. Paul was saved at midday on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus. When and where were you saved? If you do not know when and where you got saved, it did not happen. Without first being saved, you cannot begin the road to being a Christian.

- *Witness salvation with your mouth*

Acts 26:16 “*But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;*”

There is no “closet” Christian. There are no silent Christians. Christians publish abroad their salvation experience! You may be saved and never tell anyone. But, Christians gladly tell their salvation experience. The apostle Paul, when he was saved on the road to Damascus, became a witness of his salvation experience. On trial from Antioch to Rome, Paul gave his salvation testimony each time he stood to speak. Here is a Bible exercise: look in your Bible in the book of Acts and count the number of times Apostle Paul told of his salvation experience. You will then see what I am saying- Christians publish what Jesus did in saving them. Again, let me repeat, there are no “closet” Christians. Christians are saved people who gladly tell the world what Jesus has done for them. Some saved people must be ashamed of getting saved! When you decide to take the step of being a Christian, you will open your mouth and gladly tell the wondrous and marvelous thing Christ did in saving you!

- *Others see Christianity in your life*

We never should need to ask a Christian “are you a Christian?” Christians will tell you before you ask! You will see Christianity in their life with your eyes.

Are you ashamed of the life you live? Are you ashamed of your conduct before the world? Do you seek to hide your deeds? Acts 26:20 says of Paul “*But (Paul) showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*” In this verse, what is the meaning of “*do works meet for repentance?*” This phrase means “with the actions of your life, show others you have changed.” To repent means “to turn.” When you repent, you *turn* from your sin. If you were drinking whiskey, you turn from drinking whiskey. If you were a prostitute, you turn from being a prostitute. If you were gambling, you turn away from gambling. The salvation experience is a “repentance” experience. II Corinthians 5:17 says “*if any man be in Christ, he is a*

new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.” When you were supposed to have gotten saved, if you did not change, you did not get saved. *Repentance* means to turn from what you used to do and go a way from the old into a new direction. Every person in the Bible changed when they received Christ as Savior. Have you ever changed?

So, a Christian is one that others can see God in their life. Matthew 5:16 *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

- *Honors God’s house- the church*

Acts 26:21 says of Paul *“For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.”* Paul was caught in the *temple*. So, you are a Christian and you would not be caught dead in church? You are not a Christian. The first place I wanted to go when I got saved on Sunday morning was back to church on Sunday night. Christians love church, the house of God. Paul attended church. Peter and John went to the church (temple) to pray. Christ attended church. The lame man in Acts Chapter 3 went first to the church (temple) when he was healed. Folks who have no use for the church are testifying that they are not saved and certainly not a Christian.

We have all heard the excuse “there are hypocrites in the church and that is why I don’t attend.” Well, there are hypocrites in the market, but you go to market. There are hypocrites at the hospital, but when you get sick you go to the hospital. I had rather go to church with hypocrites than to go to hell with hypocrites. I am a fanatic for the church! When you get saved and become a Christian, you too will be a fanatic for the church. If you don’t enjoy church on earth, you sure don’t want to go to heaven. It will drive you crazy. Heaven is an eternity of worshipping the Lamb of God.

- *A Christian is not liked by the world*

Acts 20:21 says there was an attempt to kill Paul after he was saved... *“For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.”* Christians are the most hated people in the world. Does the world love you? Not if you are a Christian. Look at these scriptures:

Luke 6:22 *“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake.”*

John 15:18-19 *“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. 19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”*

I John 3:13 *“Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.”*

- *Loves the Bible, God’s Holy Word*

Acts 26:22 *“Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:”* The precious Bible, the Book of Books! Christians love the Bible. I never cared for the Bible when I was unsaved. It was just another book to read. One day I was saved. I still did not reverence the bible as I should. Years later God spoke to me about my life and challenged me to be more like Christ. I came to realize I could not be the Christian god wanted me to be until I gave His Word, the Bible, priority in my daily life. I fell in love with the Bible and am in love with it today. It is so precious to my life. I feel as Job who said in Job 23:12b *“...I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.”*

If today you could speak before King Agrippa, when you finished speaking would King Agrippa say **“I want to be a Christian like you?”**