

"Christian"

What does it mean to be a Christian? And who are you, if you call yourself a Christian? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." How does the Bible describe a Christian?

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. When you mention the word "Christian," people often identify the word based on their personal experiences. And some of those experiences have been good, some not so good, and some confusing. Some who call themselves Christians fail to walk worthy of the name that they wear, some lose sight of the faith, and some only call themselves Christians because their parents were. Sadly, some have never considered what the Bible teaches about who is a Christian and what it means to wear the name of Jesus Christ. Our task today is to consider what God says about being a Christian. Thanks for taking that time with us today. And we want to be a part of your life each week.

Now wearing a cross is not the same as taking up your cross daily and following the Lord. Sometimes identities can be confusing and difficult, and many are confused about what a Christian is. It shouldn't be this way. We ought to be able to identify what it means to be a disciple of Christ by looking into the New Testament. God's revealed definition of a Christian in the New Testament provides a picture of true Christianity. And God reveals what He wills for His people, how they should live, what they should believe.

The Lord Jesus you remember said in Matthew 7:21, that "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." You see, the Lord Himself distinguishes between those who follow Him and those who don't. We need to take what God says seriously, since He alone is the Judge of all people. He doesn't judge by opinion polls or by what the current culture thinks. His words will judge us on the last day.

Now we offer this study free on the identity of a true Christian. And if you'd like a printed copy of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an email to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org and on YouTube!

Well, we'll now worship in song, read from 1 Peter 4:14 to 16, and explore the true identity of a Christian.

Our reading today comes from 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 14 to 16. This was written at a time in which many of the people didn't understand Christianity, and were very critical of it, and reviles people who called themselves Christians. "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name." Yes, the name of Christian glorifies God. Let's pray together. "Father we're thankful that we can wear the name of Your Son, that we can follow after Him, and take up our crosses. We pray Father that You will bless us always as we strive to love You and to serve You. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen."

When we call ourselves Christians, we're identifying with Jesus Christ. When we wear a cross, or maybe we have one of those fish symbols that say IXTHUS, that is Jesus Christ, God's Son and Savior, or maybe we put Christian stickers on our cars, we're claiming a relationship with Jesus Christ and naming

His name. The term “Christian” is used only three times in the New Testament and refers to one “who belongs to Christ” or “the Christ-people.” Scripture uses it as a noun, not an adjective.

In Acts 14:17 that passage says that “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” Now some say “Christian” in this passage was a term of ridicule, but the word “called” here is an unusual one. It’s only used to speak of what God names or calls. Isaiah 62 and verse 2 says, “And the nations will see your righteousness, And all the kings your glory; And you will be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will designate.” For this prophecy speaks of the coming Messiah and His kingdom, the church that wears His name. Colossians 3 and verse 17 says, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

In Acts 26, Paul was on trial before King Agrippa and reminded the king of Jesus Christ, because the things Jesus did were not done in a corner. Now Paul was confident King Agrippa believed the prophets. And Agrippa replied to Paul, “well now ‘in such a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?’ And Paul said, ‘Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains’ (Acts 26:28 to 29).

Now if I’m a “Christian,” belonging to Jesus Christ, do people know it? Can they tell by my actions, my speech, my faith, and my deeds? Acts 4:13 says, “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” Now, 1 Peter 4:14 to 16 says, as we’ve read, that “If you’re reviled for the name of Christ, you’re blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he’s not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

Wearing the name of Christ is a great privilege and has many facets. We want to look at what words the New Testament uses to describe a Christian. Christians were first disciples of Christ, and then called Christians. Now, disciples were not only students, they were actually imitators of the master that they followed. Now, if I’m a disciple of Christ, do I really follow Jesus? Do I know His teachings, and do I imitate Him? You see, true disciples continue or abide in Christ’s words (John 8 and verse 31). True disciples love one another (John 13:34 to 35). And proven disciples bear fruit that glorifies God (John 15 and verse 8).

Well, children of God are also thought of as Christians. John 1:12 to 13 says, “But to all who did receive him (that is Jesus), who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Now if I as a Christian am a child of God, it’s because God determined that, not my feelings or assumptions. Now we can read in Scripture who is a child of God. Galatians 3:26 to 27 says, “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” You see, Christians are baptized believers, who have obeyed the gospel and have been buried and raised with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:3 to 7). And if I’m a child of God, do people know that I fear God? 1 Peter 1:17 says, “And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth.”

Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ. In Romans 1:13 and many other places, Paul spoke to the Christians in Rome as brothers and sisters. Now if I’m a brother in Christ, do I have brotherly love? The Lord Jesus said in John 13:34 to 35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. And by this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Peter speaks of virtues that all Christians should develop in 2 Peter 1, verses 5 to 8, he said “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence,

in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence (that is virtue), knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For (he says) if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

On another occasion John calls Christians "friends." 3 John 14 says, "The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name." If you are a friend, are you friendly to God? Are you a friend to Jesus? The Lord Jesus said in John 15:13 to 14, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. And you are My friends if you do what I command you." James 2:23 says that Abraham was "called the friend of God." Now how we live determines our friendships. James 4 and verse 4 says, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." You can't make friends with worldly, sinful ways and remain friends with God. You see, the "world" as James speaks of it has no room for God in it. Be a friend to God!

Not only that, but Christians are also "saints," all of them. Every person who is a Christian is also thought of in scripture as a saint. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, "to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." Now to be sanctified means to be made holy, separated from the unclean and sinful things. And if I am a saint, well do I live a life separate from sin? 2 Corinthians 6, verses 17 to 18 says, "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

More than that, Christians are members of the body of Christ, which according to Ephesians 1 and verse 22 is the church. Being a Christian and a member of the Lord's church revealed in Scripture are synonymous. You can't separate the two. If you call yourself a Christian but have no use for the church, you're actually rebelling against the will of God, yes. On the day of Pentecost the Lord added those who were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins to the believers and apostles (Acts 2 and verse 41). And those who were saved were added to their number, that is the church (Acts 2 and verse 47). Those who were baptized were forgiven and also saved.

Now if I'm a member of the body of Christ, do I recognize Jesus as the head of the church? Do I do my part in the work of the church? Can others count on me? Ephesians 4, verses 15 and 16 says, "But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, this causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." Sadly many who call themselves Christians do little or nothing to build up the body or the church of Jesus Christ. They don't grow in faith, or hope, or love. They never think of what they can do to help the church to grow.

More than that, Christians are citizens of the kingdom of God. Ephesians 2:19 to 22 spoke of the pagans in Ephesus who became Christians. And Paul said, "So then you're no longer strangers and aliens, but you're fellow citizens with the saints, and you are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." I tell you there is no greater blessing and no

higher calling than to be a citizen in the kingdom of God. Now, if I'm a citizen, do I obey the laws of the kingdom of God, that is the laws in scripture for the church?

Now more than that Christians are heirs of God. Romans 8, verses 16 to 17 says, that "The Spirit Himself testifies (or bears witness) with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him." 1 Peter 1:3 to 4 reminds us, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! And according to his great mercy, he's caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." Christians who remain faithful to the Lord have an inheritance reserved in heaven for them. And nothing could be grander than knowing that we can live with the Lord Jesus forever and ever.

Philippians 3, verses 20 and 21 says, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." One day Jesus Christ will come for His people. And according to 1 Corinthians 15, He'll change their earthly bodies into bodies that are fit for heaven, bodies that are imperishable and immortal. They will be glorified spiritual bodies.

And if I'm an heir of heaven, a fellow-heir with Christ, do I live with eternity in mind and in heart? Do I long to be with the Lord in heaven? 2 Peter 3:10 to 14 says, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we're looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless."

Oh, it's not enough to call yourself a Christian, you must also follow Christ with your thoughts, your speech, and your life. You must believe what He teaches and walk in His steps. Faithful Christians live their faith, worship with a local church, give of themselves, pray, love people, help the hurting, and share their faith. Faithful Christians spend much time studying the word of God, so that they will not be fooled by deceptions and half-truths. Colossians 1:10 urges us to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects." Will God count you worthy of your calling?

Let's pray together. "Heavenly Father help us to serve You from a full heart, to live for You and for Your cause, to love You and to love others. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen."

2 Timothy 2:19 says that God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." The Christian life is a life of transformation, leaving an old sinful way of life, false teachings, and deceitful ways and turning to righteousness according to God's will. God is gracious to us, but God expects us to change our hearts and our lives.

Titus 2:11 to 14 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." That, my friend, is how God intended Christianity to be.

And I pray that you'll see the beauty of serving the Lord from a heart of love. Living sensibly, righteously, and godly is the way to hope and peace and eternal life. To become a Christian, put your trust in Jesus Christ, turn your heart and life from sin to righteousness taught in Scripture, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). And then God will wash away your sins when you're baptized, immersed in water (Acts 22 verse 16 and Romans 6:3 to 7).

You see true Christianity comes from the Lord Jesus, and it's the Christianity described in the New Testament. And don't settle for anything more or anything less. Don't let the world tell you what it thinks Christianity is; study the New Testament for yourself. There's no substitute for doing the will of God.

Well we hope that today's study about the identity of a true Christian has been a blessing. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an email to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area at www.searchtv.org. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." And be sure to like the programs you watch; this helps us spread the program. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you draw close to God.

Focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church family. And there's probably a church of Christ near you. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.