

What It Means to Be a Christian

We receive many messages and comments on our teachings and videos. Today we are answering a question from one of those messages as we talk about what it means to be a Christian.

Introduction

We receive many comments and messages after our weekly teachings and videos. We cannot respond to them all, and some are just people looking for an argument. Some other comments or questions are common and they prompt a message or video. That is what today's teaching is a result of.

What does it mean to be a Christian? That is a great question. There are many thoughts and ideas on what this means. Many people in the world say they are Christian and many faiths or religions say they are Christian, but are they? Many nations and people say they are Christian too, but are they?

Today we're going to discuss what it means to be a Christian and dismiss some of the popular beliefs that aren't true.

First People Called Christians

Antioch was the first place people were referred to as Christians during the time that Paul and Barnabus were preaching and teaching there. We read this in Acts 11:25-26 which says:

Acts 11:25-26

(25) Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, (26) and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

This is the beginning of the gospel being preached to gentiles in large numbers. Gentiles are people who are not of Jewish descent, that is descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

These believers in Antioch were called Christians because they not only heard Paul and Barnabus' teaching of the gospel, but they believed it and followed the teachings of Jesus and gave their life to Jesus. In other words, they said "Yes!" to Jesus.

Let's look at John 10:7-16 and see what they said yes to.

John 10:7-16

(7) Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. (8) All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. (9) I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. (10) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (11) "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (12) The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. (13) The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. (14) "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- (15) just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. (16) I have



other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

John 8:12 says:

John 8:12

(12) When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

When we say yes to Jesus, we agree to give up ownership of our life, ambitions, and desires and we begin to follow him taking on his desires and ambitions for us.

Deciding to Follow Jesus

A decision to follow Jesus should not be taken lightly. Look at Luke 9:57-62

Luke 9:57-62

(57) As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." (58) Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (59) He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." (60) Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." (61) Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." (62) Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

A decision to follow Jesus means a life that may not be fully understood by those around you. It means giving up the title to all of your possessions and becoming a steward of them and using them for Jesus' kingdom.

At Pentecost, after Jesus' ascension, Peter explains what just happened with the Holy Spirit. He shares the simple truths of the gospel with the crowd after he reminds the people of their history and heritage. Then he is asked a question. Let's read Acts 2:37-39.

Acts 2:37-39

(37) When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (38) Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (39) The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Each person must choose to follow Jesus themselves. It can't be done for you.

Becoming a Christian is a Personal Decision

A decision to follow Jesus means to turn fully from any and all influences that could distract you from the plan and purpose the Lord has for you. You must look forward to where the Lord is leading you, not behind where you have been. Imagine driving a car by only focusing your attention on your mirrors. Not only do you have a poor view of where you are going, but you also have a limited view of where you have been. You're going to crash!



Some people believe that because you live in a Christian nation, you are a Christian. Friends, there are no Christian nations. Even a nation that adopts Christianity as the “state religion” has corrupted Jesus’ teaching that only an individual can make that decision for themselves.

You cannot be forced to be a Christian. If you do not freely give up your life and follow Jesus, you haven’t given it up and you aren’t following him. Following Jesus hinges on us freely giving up our free will. That can’t be done by a national edict or law.

Being a Christian cannot be inherited either. Many people think they are Christians because their parents are. They think that because their mother or father believed in Jesus and followed him that they are saved. This is simply not true.

Small children who do not have the capacity to understand are taken care of until they reach that time in their life when they can understand the sacrifice Jesus made and understand the need for it. At that time, they must decide for themselves whether to follow Jesus or not.

Some believe you must earn your way to God to be a Christian. They believe because you do good things and love people, you are a Christian. Again, not true. This is getting the cart before the horse, so to speak. True Christians love one another, and others, and serve people without looking for compensation or recognition. They are not Christians because they earned it. They do these things because they are Christian.

This is completely opposite of Paul’s teaching that salvation is by grace alone that we are saved.

Look at Ephesians 2:8-9

Ephesians 2:8-9

(8) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- (9) not by works, so that no one can boast.

If we are saved by our own good deeds, we could boast and we would not need Jesus’ sacrifice and subsequent resurrection.

What does it mean to be a Christian?

Being A Christian Means

It means that you yourself have made a personal decision to let go of the things that bind you to this earth and this worldly existence and give your life, desires, and dreams to Jesus and take on his and follow him.

It means that you will freely allow the Holy Spirit to equip you for the tasks that God predestined for you as he knit you together in your mother’s womb. It also means that you will be a witness to the power of Jesus Christ in your life and share the change He has made in you with others.

Conclusion

You cannot earn being a Christian, you cannot inherit it, and you certainly do not deserve it. It is by the grace of God through the forgiveness of our sins that we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ and it



is his worthiness that we clothe ourselves with so that we can be adopted into the family of God and be reconciled back to God, our creator. That is what it means to be a Christian.

Maybe you have not asked Jesus into your heart. Maybe this is all new to you today. Saying “yes” to Jesus is simple. It is merely acknowledging Jesus is the son of God, that he willfully died to pay for and forgive your sins, and that he rose again. Ask him into your heart.

Simply pray this simple prayer:

“Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I know that you are the son of God. I believe you paid the price for me on a Roman cross and were raised from the dead. I ask you into my heart and freely give you my life. Cleanse me and make me new. Thank you, Jesus.”

If you prayed that and meant it, please let us know. There’s an “I said Yes” to Jesus button on our website at www.celllifechurch.org.

