

## What Does it Mean to be a Christian?

Many people believe that they are a Christian because they live in the United States--a "christian" nation--or because they go to a christian church. What does it really mean to say that you claim the name "Christian"? Let's look at what the Bible has to say:

### I. The Origin of the Term

The teachings of Jesus and the apostles were not originally considered a *new* religion, but merely a sect within the existing Jewish faith. This was accurate, for Jesus was the fulfillment of all the Jewish expectations. He was their Messiah. But much of the existing Jewish nation of Jesus' day rejected Him and His claims as their Messiah, so there began to be division between the followers of the Jewish religious leadership and the followers of Jesus. In the book of Acts the followers of Jesus are first referred to as "Christians":

. . . Barnabus and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. [11:26b]

Luke, the author of Acts, makes it very clear only those who are disciples should be called Christians. That is what the term "Christian" fundamentally means: one who is committed wholeheartedly to the teachings and ministry of Jesus--A disciple of Christ.

### II. What Do Christians Believe?

Many people consider themselves Christians, but they don't even know what Jesus taught. Isn't it ironic that someone would consider themselves to be committed to what Jesus

stood for, and not even *know* what Jesus stood for?

At the heart of Jesus' message was the *good news of the Kingdom of God*, sometimes referred to simply as *the gospel*. The gospel can be summarized by three key words: *guilt*, *grace* and *gratitude*.

A. GUILT. The Bible teaches that every man, woman and child that has ever lived is not innocent before God, but guilty. Our guilty condition is not only a result of our own personal sin, but more fundamentally a result of the sin of Adam in the garden of Eden [Romans 5:12ff]. King David affirms that he was a sinner even before he was born when he laments: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." [Psalm 51:5]. This inherited sinful nature is compounded by our own personal wickedness. The Bible says that there is. . .

no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. [Romans 3:10b,11]

The natural human condition is rebellion against God. We are guilty and deserving of God's punishment. But the gospel teaches that there is a way of escape from God's hand of wrath.

B. GRACE. We could not pay for our own sin and guilt in an eternity. The Bible teaches that our sins have made an unbridgable chasm between ourselves and God. Isaiah puts it this way:

. . . your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. [59:2]

Our best deeds cannot earn God's favor or pay for our sins. The Bible teaches that God overcomes our sinful guilt not through our works, but through His works. By His grace:

For it is by *grace* you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the *gift of God--not by*

*works*, so that no one can boast. [Ephesians 2:8,9]

Jesus Christ became a man, lived a perfect life, was crucified, buried and resurrected in order to provide for our forgiveness. What we could never earn in an eternity, Jesus earned for us through his perfect life and crosswork.

C. GRATITUDE. When we realize our own hopeless sinful condition and the forgiveness available through Jesus' gracious provision we are motivated to live for Him! The Bible calls this life of gratitude "fruitfulness." All God's children are called to bear the fruit of obedience to Christ. If we don't want to live a life of *gratitude*, then we probably don't really understand our *guilt* and God's *grace*.

### III. How Do I Become a Christian?

We receive this gracious gift of eternal life by believing that Jesus alone has the power to cleanse us from our sins and *placing our hope in him alone for our eternal salvation*. We must recognize Jesus Christ as our only hope for the forgiveness of our sins. We must abandon any hopes of saving ourselves and cast ourselves at the feet of Christ, hoping only in his grace. Our works will never save us, only God's grace will [Ephesians 2:8,9].

If you are at the point of realizing your guilt and you want to trust in Jesus Christ as your only hope for salvation simply tell it to God. Pray, and let Him know that you believe the good news of *guilt*, *grace* and *gratitude*. He promises to hear your prayer and He has never rejected anyone who has sincerely cried out to Him for forgiveness! If you need someone to pray with you or assist you in prayer, then please contact a pastor, elder or *any member of the church*. It would be a great joy to assist you in turning to Jesus Christ as your Savior!

FOR FURTHER STUDY:  
*Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis

***Key Questions:***

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