

You Call Yourself a “Christian” But Are You... Really?

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Many people, especially in America, if they happen to be in a conversation that mentions religious beliefs, would say if asked, that they consider themselves “Christian.” On what, do many, if not most people base such a reply? Many people reason that if they do not follow the many other religions besides Christianity, such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, etc. this means that they must be “Christian” by default; unless of course they claim to be Atheist. A preacher told of a story of a man whom when asked if he was a Christian replied, “Of course I am, I am an American!” He then pulled a penny from his pocket and pointed out where it said, “In God We Trust!” While this may seem humorous to some, the sad fact is that this illustrates the shallowness of many peoples understanding of what it means to be a Christian. I will now pose this question to you... “Do *you* call yourself a Christian?” Before you answer, consider one other question... “If you say you are a Christian, does anyone else know you are a Christian apart from you saying so?” Many people when asked about their belief in God or the Bible might say something like, “I believe in God and the Bible, but I keep my beliefs to myself.” I have a member of my own family who claims to be a Christian. She reads the Bible, reads many books by various Christian authors and theologians; yet one day I asked her, “Have you ever led, or had a hand in leading someone to Jesus in your thirty plus years of claiming to be a Christian?” Her reply was, “No.” I went on to ask if she had ever talked about the Bible with any of her friends or acquaintances... again the answer was, “No.” That was one of the most devastating replies I ever heard in my life... I love this person dearly; yet her perception of what it is to be a Christian is not only weak, but distorted.

What does it *really* mean to be a Christian? Some equate “Being a Christian” with simply going to church, much the same that they would consider themselves a “Yankee Fan” because they go to Yankee Stadium. However, even in Yankee Stadium there will be large numbers of people on the side of the opposing team! The bottom line is that being in Yankee Stadium does not necessarily make you a Yankee Fan! Other people will consider themselves a Christian because they read the Bible, even on a regular basis; perhaps they do a daily devotional reading and they feel uplifted and enlightened in the process. Does this make them a Christian? No... it makes them a devoted reader of scripture or in some cases just another “Religious” person. For example, if I were to read one medical book a week for a year, would I be then considered a doctor of medicine? *One* may consider oneself a doctor in doing so, but No... they are not a doctor! Therefore, another important question concerning Christianity to consider is, “What are some of the indicators that a person is in fact a Christian?” First, we must look at some of the general definitions of the term “Christian” from secular sources. One definition states that a Christian is merely “A believer in Jesus as Savior.” Encarta Dictionary Another defines Christian as a “Kind and unselfish person.” Encarta Dictionary While the first definition is a definite prerequisite for claiming to be a Christian, the latter, by itself, could describe many Atheists! There are many “kind and unselfish” people that deny everything the Bible says, including what it says concerning Jesus. Therefore, in order to get a better grasp as to what it means to be a Christian, we have to go to the “source” the Bible. The actual name “Christian” only appears 3 times in the New Testament, Acts 11, Acts 26, and 1 Peter 4. It comes from the Greek word, “Christianos” (Pronounced Khris-Tee-an-os) which simple means, “Follower of Christ.”

Strong’s Greek Hebrew Dictionary

Are you a “*Follower*” of Jesus Christ? A follower is one who supports or admires another particular person or belief. Others words used to describe a follower might be, “*a fan of, a devotee, an adherent, an imitator of, a disciple.*” Therefore, the summation is that when a person calls themselves a Christian, this implies they not only *believe* in Jesus, they admire Him, they are a fan of Him, they are an imitator of Jesus, they adhere to His teachings, and are devoted to Him! How do you stack up as a Christian using this as your criteria? Whatever you may think about God and the Bible from a “Worldly Perspective” does not matter. There are many differing opinions in modern society concerning Jesus, many different religions and cults offering their own “path to god,” but I know now that there is only one true God! I know that many reading this may disagree with that last statement.

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After all, what gives *me* the audacity to say there is only one true God someone might ask? I will give you the short answer to that question... years of study with a commitment to finding the truth, coupled ultimately with a personal relationship with God! It started roughly 65 years ago as I sat next to my mother in a Catholic church. My mother was Catholic and my father was Russian Orthodox, so at an early age I was made aware of this mysterious person or force called, God. However, as a child, I had no real comprehension of god but I was curious as to what all the pomp and ceremony was all about. I heard the name Jesus repeated many times, but I had no clue as to who He was and what He did. I did however, feel a strong desire to find out, I wanted to know more about this Jesus and his relationship to God. It would be another 14 years before I heard and began to comprehend the whole story, but I was skeptical because what I was hearing did not agree with what I remember hearing and seeing as a child. It was then that I started to seriously read the Bible... it was then I started seeing, and understanding the “*unbiased*” truth.

One of the first things I learned as I began reading the Bible was that being “religious” does not “get you right with God!” In fact, there is nothing you or I can *do* to get right with God. However, the religions I grew up in had many rules that had to be followed in order to find favor with God. Even as a young child it was obvious to me that not too many people were good at keeping the rules. Some were better than others might have been, but everyone failed at some point. This was exactly what the Bible teaches! **Romans 3:23 (NKJV)** ²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...* This particular verse verified what I had been observing! With this in mind, everyone should consider how well they themselves are following what they say they believe. Most people eventually form their own interpretation or image of God. Ironically, the final product so to speak, is a god who agrees with that person’s lifestyle or their particular desires. If you call yourself a “Christian,” how would you describe your god to someone? Would you describe him merely as a good friend that takes care of your needs and desires? Is your god someone who is ok with whatever you do as long as *you* “feel” it is ok? Or – is your god the Creator of the universe, the “All Powerful One” who deserves your respect, obedience, and worship? Is your god the one who “makes the rules,” or are you making the rules as you go along? Regardless of your interpretation of god and the bible, these questions apply, even for people who truly are Christians. A long time ago, a preacher made the comparison of life to a person at a buffet restaurant. You go through life picking and choosing what you like and passing by what you do not like. However, after you make your choices, the last stop is at the Cash Register. There comes a time that you have to pay for the choices you made. I never forgot that illustration. It is therefore important when choosing whom, or what you are willing to follow and give your allegiance to as to what the cost may be in the end. It is easy to say, “I am a Christian,” but the Bible says that “True Christians” are known by their “Fruit.” What does this mean? **Luke 6:44-45 (NKJV)** ⁴⁴ *For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush.* ⁴⁵ *A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*

What it all boils down to is that “True Christians” will be known not only by their words, but more importantly by their actions, whether they are living a life consistent with the teachings of Jesus and the Bible reveals the true condition of their heart. Once again, if you are among those that call yourself a Christian, how are you doing as you examine you own life? Another preacher, years ago, asked the following question, “If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” This is something we all must ask ourselves from time to time. Is your claim of being a “Follower of Christ,” just words... or is it obvious by our actions?

Matthew 7:20-23 (NKJV)

²⁰ Therefore by their fruits you will know them. ²¹ “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. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”