

"Authentic Christianity"

When people speak of Christianity, it's often quite different from what the New Testament teaches about Christianity. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study, In Search of the Lord's Way. What is authentic Christianity, and what is it really like? Let's find out!

Welcome to *In Search of the Lord's Way*, where we search the Scriptures to find the Lord's way of life and salvation. Thanks for spending this time with us. Oh we love hearing from you that you're watching or listening. And we want to be a part of your life each week.

If you ask the question "what is Christianity?" people will give you all kinds of opinions. They'll tell you what they think Christianity is or what they wish it were. People see Christianity historically and socially as it appears in America; but if that's all they see, they may never know what Christianity really is. Today we're exploring the question, "What is authentic Christianity?" Is the Christianity we see today what God intended when He sent Jesus into this world? In the early days Christians were known among themselves as "brethren," "the faithful," "the elect," "saints" (and all of them were called saints by the way), and they were also thought of as "believers." But people outside the church called them "Christians." This term came by the will of God, and it was universally accepted.

You might think the word "Christian" would occur frequently in the New Testament, but it occurs only three times. The word "Christian" refers to an individual who "belongs to Christ." Originally words that ended in the letters "i-a-n" applied to the slaves belonging to the great households, it had passed into regular use to refer to followers of an individual or a party. Some Bible dictionaries define the word Christian as "The name given by the Greeks or Romans, probably in reproach, to the followers of Jesus. It was first used at Antioch." But the name "Christian" is far more than that, as we will see.

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The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Acts 26:24 to 29, and we'll think seriously about authentic Christianity.

Our reading today in the New Testament comes from the book of Acts, chapter 26, verses 24 to 29. "While *Paul* was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you're out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad. But Paul said, 'I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.' Agrippa *replied* to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to be a Christian.' And Paul *said*, 'I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.'" That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray together. Father we're grateful for Your love and we're thankful Father for the hope that we have in Christ, that He was raised from the dead and stands as our Lord. And Father we pray that we may do Your will always on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

The first time “Christian” is used in the New Testament is in Acts 11 verses 25 to 26, the text says, “So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.” Now the word for “called” here is *chrematisai*, not the common word for “called” from the word *kalleo*. *Chrematisai* refers to a divinely revealed name or instruction. The name “Christian” didn’t actually come from men; it came from God in fulfillment of the prophecy found in Isaiah 62 and verse 2: “The nations will see your righteousness, And all kings your glory; And you will be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the LORD will designate.”

Now to call myself a Christian means that I am a servant of Christ. I wear His name, I follow His teaching, I call upon him as my Lord, and share in his spiritual and moral way of life. A disciple is a person who imitates his master, becomes like him in manner, in speech, in mind, and in behavior. The disciples were called Christians. Both words, “disciples” and “Christians,” show the close relationship between the Lord Jesus and those who follow him. I am happy and honored to wear the name of Jesus and those who follow Him. Now I’m happy and honored to wear the name of Jesus Christ. I love Him and I want to wear His name. And I don’t mind the world knowing that I am his servant.

The second time the word Christian is used is also found in the book of Acts. In chapter 26, Paul is defending himself and his faith before the Roman governor Festus and the Jewish king Herod Agrippa. And Paul said in Acts 26:27 to 29, “‘King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? (he said that) I know that you believe.’ And Agrippa said to Paul, ‘In 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.’” Paul wished everyone was a Christian, and so do I. My friend, I hope you’re a Christian.

People choose to be Christians; nobody is born one. We might be born into a family of Christians, but that doesn’t make us a Christian. We have to decide for ourselves. We must be born again to become a Christian. And we do that when we by faith decide to follow Christ and to be baptized. The Bible says in Romans 6 verses 16 to 18, “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, that you’re slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became the slaves of righteousness.” You see, you can become a Christian by your heartfelt obedience to the gospel. And each of you, each of all of us, must choose to believe and to obey.

Now the Bible teaches in Ephesians about the transformation that takes place when a person becomes a Christian. Ephesians 4:17 to 24 says: “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They’re darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that’s in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves over to sensuality, to greedy and every practice of every impurity. But that’s not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you’ve heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

You must make a true change when you decide to become a Christian. You must leave an old sinful way of life, a way that's darkened and futile; and you must put on the new way of life that is patterned after Jesus Christ. A Christian who loves the Lord no longer wants to live the way the world lives. He sees an abundant life that is higher and nobler than his old way. Christianity is the way that people become new. They're no longer darkened in their understanding, living callous and impure lives. Now in Christ, they have learned a better way, full of love and full of good deeds. People learn Christ, and as they grow in their knowledge, their lives become better and better.

The third Scripture which mentions the name "Christian" is in 1 Peter 4 verses 15 to 16. These verses say: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name." Now here in this passage the Bible says that one should not be ashamed of being a Christian but to glorify God in THAT name, that God-given name that associates us with Jesus Christ our Lord. Christians were undergoing serious persecution at the time that Peter wrote this to them. I could see how some might feel hesitant to admit that they were Christians, if it meant persecution. Others might hesitate if they acted sinfully and brought reproach upon their faith. But wearing the name of Christ honorably glorifies God. This is truly the name that God designates for his people.

The apostle Paul, like Peter, was willing to endure whatever shame and punishment necessary in order to preach the gospel and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul felt obligated to serve the Lord in a pagan society. He said in Romans 1 verses 14 to 16, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I'm eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Now, no one has to be ashamed of the gospel of the Lord Jesus, because of all the good that Christ does in their lives.

A Christian doesn't have to be ashamed when he wakes up without a hangover. A Christian doesn't have to be ashamed that he tells the truth, that he keeps his word, that he practices what is right, and that he loves his neighbor. The way of Christians is God's way, God's plan to bless all of mankind. And that's why Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They are God's people making a difference for good and right in an evil world. In their lives they prove what the will of God is, that which is "good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12 and verse 2).

Well, what does it mean then to be a Christian? It means: I don't belong to me; I totally belong to my Lord Jesus Christ. I have given Him first place in my life. I believe what He teaches. I practice a life that imitates Him. He loves, so I love. He gives of himself, so I give of myself. He avoids evil, so I avoid evil. He kept his heart right, so I keep my heart right. To belong totally to Christ is a radical notion. And the reason many people wonder what a Christian is arises from the fact that many so-called Christians play with the notion of following Christ but never fully embrace the idea that we fully belong to him and not to ourselves.

Many think being a Christian is a great thing until it interferes with what they want to do. They're willing to let God be a part of their lives to some extent, but they're unwilling to follow Jesus when they don't agree with Him or they don't like what He asks of them. They like Jesus until he interferes with their freedom to live as they please. Such people may call themselves Christians, but they're only fair-weather Christians.

They've forgotten the price that Jesus paid to redeem them. The Bible says in 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 18 to 19, "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold (you know, God could have made all the

silver and gold He wanted, you could have been redeemed by that, but that wouldn't have cost anything, no it wasn't by silver or gold that you were redeemed), but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." The Lord Jesus paid His precious blood to save and redeem you from sin and, yes, from hell. What He has done for you and will give to you far, far outweighs any earthly pleasure. We all ought to count it an honor to belong to Jesus.

The Bible says in Colossians 1:13 to 14, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and then transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Jesus took us from sin and darkness and brought us into the kingdom of hope and peace and promise. He rescued us from an evil world and brought us to the love of God. How could we imagine living ungodly lives, when we consider all that he has done for us? 1 Corinthians 6 verses 19 to 20 says, "Or do you not know that your body, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

In the book of Philippians Paul described himself in chapter one and verse one as a bond-servant of Christ Jesus. Now to be a bond-servant means that I am a slave, a slave in chains to my Lord. The Lord owns me, and you know what, He has a right to make important decisions that affect my life, decisions that I cannot change, that I cannot overrule. Christianity is not a democracy where I can vote things in and vote things out, no; it's a kingdom. And Jesus Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is in charge, He makes the rules, and we must submit our hearts to Him.

So much of what people think of as "Christianity" is changed from what Jesus meant for it to be. People have filled it full of human creeds and human traditions so that it hardly resembles His divinely revealed will in the New Testament. For many people Christianity is like a smorgasbord laid out for them, and they can pick and choose whatever they like. You pick the kind of Christianity in their minds the kind of Jesus that you want. You pick the kind of church that you like. You pick what you want to believe and you can leave the rest alone if you like. Many fail to hear God fully but hear only what they want to hear. Let me tell you something, that kind of religion is not the Christianity of the Bible; it's the kind of Christianity that people manufacture for themselves. It's not divine; it's human!

New Testament Christianity is built upon the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ! It's built on divine truth found in the scriptures, because God never lies. Jesus loves us so much that He willingly died for us. And His grace and forgiveness are available to all. He's the Lord of all mankind, you and me and everybody. And His words are the final authority for our faith, our practices, and our morals. You may think that you have a say so, but God has the last say, and what He says is powerful and authoritative. His promises are open to all who will believe and obey, and He's coming again to judge the world in righteousness.

Biblical Christianity is the most exciting, fulfilling, powerful, and loving life imaginable. To have Jesus as Lord and Savior and God as our Father is the best life with the best mission and the best result. God wants us to spread the good word to everyone. In Mark 16 verses 15 to 16 Jesus said "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." Oh I tell you, Jesus is in the saving business, and His church is the way that He spreads the gospel to all. Let's pray together. Oh Father we're thankful that through Your love and grace that we have the opportunity to be members of Your church, and to follow Your will. We're thankful Father so much for Jesus. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. It's in His name, the Lord our Savior Jesus Christ, that we pray, Amen!

People often define Christianity unfairly. Many don't understand the Christianity of the New Testament. Now talk to some about Christianity and the first they bring up the crusades or witch trials. But neither the crusades or the Salem witch trials or the inquisition reflect New Testament Christianity. Titles, robes, cathedrals and icons don't show simple, New Testament Christianity. Monasteries, and incense, sitting on flagpoles, vows of silence, and forced celibacy don't reflect the Christianity of the Bible. Worship concerts, enterprises, fake healings have nothing to do with Christianity of the New Testament. If you want to know what real Christianity is, look in the Scriptures. The New Testament gives God's truth about Christianity.

Now New Testament Christianity is God's way to bless this world with love, with purity, with grace, with hope, and with heaven. 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 the 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."

Are you one of the redeemed? Have you become a Christian? To become one, believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, repent of your sins, confess the name of Christ, and be baptized. Now baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And when you're baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins and add you to His church. He'll rescue you out of the domain of darkness and transfer you into His kingdom. Don't let even one day go by outside of Christ or true Christianity.

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