

## The New Testament Church

### Part 18: Who Is a Christian?

Acts 26:24-29

#### I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Whenever the truth is taught it always generates controversy (**Jn. 3:19-20**: “*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*”).
2. In our series of lessons on the New Testament Church we’ve touched on a number of controversial subjects (e.g., oneness of the church; apostasy over the centuries, etc.).
3. **3** In this morning’s lesson we will continue our study of the New Testament Church by considering a very controversial topic with some: **Who Is a Christian?**
  - A. When we published articles in the newspaper in Michigan this topic, other than the “oneness” of Christ’s church, probably generated the most letters to the editor (negative!).
  - B. Many people, including members of the Lord’s church, get very sensitive over this subject.
  - C. Many get very emotional over this topic and antagonistic towards the one bringing the message.
4. **4** When one teaches on this subject many take the attitude “Who are you to say who is a Christian and who isn’t?!”
  - A. I would be the first to agree: I’m a nobody! It is not up to me to determine who is a Christian!
  - B. God, and God alone, is the One who determines who and who is not a Christian.
  - C. **BUT**, God has clearly revealed in His word “Who Is a Christian”! And as a preacher of His word it is my responsibility to teach what His word says concerning “Who Is a Christian?” (Ezek. 33)
5. **\*\*** Thus, my appeal to answer this question will be to God’s word and it alone (**Jn. 17:17; 8:31-32**: “*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*”; **1 Pet. 4:11; Psalms 119:105**: “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*”; **Jn. 12:48**).
6. Thus, I urge you to imitate the Bereans and as I preach this lesson “search the Scriptures...to find out whether these things [are] so” (Acts 17:11).

#### II. DISCUSSION:

##### A Christian is one who is...

1. **5** “in Christ”:
  - A. The epistle to the Ephesians is obviously a letter written by Paul to folks who were Christians (see Acts 18-20).
  - B. In chapter one of the book Paul talks extensively concerning the concept of one being “in Christ”:
  - C. In that chapter Paul uses the phrases “in Christ” and “in Him” at least seven times in **vv. 3-14**.
  - D. I don’t think any honest person would argue that in order to be a Christian one must be “in Christ.”
  - E. This being true, then if we search God’s word and find out how one gets “in Christ,” then we’ve answered the question: **Who Is a Christian?**
    - (1) Paul answers this in Galatians 3:26-27:

**Gal. 3:26-27:** “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

(2) Note that v. 27 tells us who is a son of God, a Christian.

(a) Paul says the “sons of God” are those who have “put on Christ.”

(b) How does one “put on Christ”? v. 27: “as many of you as were baptized into Christ”!

F. But notice also that in v. 26 Paul describes Christians as those who have “faith in Christ Jesus.”

(1) Faith is essential to becoming a Christian (Heb. 11:6).

(2) Faith comes only by “hearing” God’s word (Rom. 10:17; no direct operation of the Holy Spirit; Christianity is a thinking man’s religion).

(a) Jesus said: **Jn. 6:44-45:** “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.”

(b) How does God “draw” us? How are we “taught by God”? The gospel!

**2 Thess. 2:13-14:** “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**Jas. 1:18:** “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth...”

**1 Pet. 1:23:** “...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...”

**Eph. 1:13-14:** “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,”

(c) Because the gospel is God’s “calling card” is why Jesus gave the Great Commission:

**Mk. 16:15-16:** “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

**Matt. 28:19-20:** “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...”

(3) **6** Note that those hearing the gospel are made into “disciples” or learners; they are learning what God requires of them to be saved (**Acts 2:21:** “And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”).

(a) Those who obeyed the gospel and became Christians in Acts 2 did so by “calling on the name of the LORD.”

(b) They obviously believed the point of Peter’s sermon (**Acts 2:36:** “...God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”); thus, they had “faith.”

(c) We know this is true because they asked Peter: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (v. 37)

(d) Perhaps you never thought of it this way, but it’s true; these folks were essentially asking Peter: “What must we do to “call on the name of the LORD and be saved.”

- (e) Peter answers their question in v. 38: *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*
- (f) Isn’t this exactly what Paul told the Galatians? Recall how he said one *“puts on [get in] Christ”*? Gal. 3:27: *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*
- (g) In fact, this is the exact same thing Saul of Tarsus was told to do in order to *“call on the name of the LORD”*: Acts 22:16: *“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”*
- (4) Who is a Christian? One who hears the gospel message, believes Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and acts on this faith by repenting of his/her sins and submitting to the Lord in baptism. Peter said he/she receives: (1) *“the remission of sins,”* and (2) *“the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*
  - (a) What is *“the gift of the Holy Spirit”*?
  - (b) *“...whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* (Acts 2:21)
- G. If one does not meet these conditions he is not a Christian!
  - (1) Because I say so? No! Because God’s word says so!
  - (2) Will God make exceptions? Remember, *“God...cannot lie”* (Titus 1:2); *“...it is impossible for God to lie...”* (Heb. 6:18)
  - (3) **\*\* Serious business!**  
**2 Thess. 1:7-9:** *“...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,”*

### A Christian is one who has been...

#### 2. **7** *“added to the church...those who were being saved”*:

- A. Let’s go back to Acts 2 and notice something else about these folks.
  - (1) Recall Peter’s instructions concerned how one may *“call on the name of the LORD”*?
  - (2) Peter told them: **Acts 2:38:** *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*
- B. V. 41 tells us: **Acts 2:41:** *“...those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”*
  - (1) *“added”* to what?
  - (2) **Acts 2:47:** *“...the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”*
- C. Who *“added”* who to what?
  - (1) The *“adding”* was done by the *“Lord.”*
  - (2) Those being *“added”* were those *“who gladly received his [Peter] word”* and *“were baptized”* (v. 41) and were *“those who were being saved”* (v. 47) (i.e., **Acts 2:21:** *“...whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”*).
  - (3) To what did the Lord add these people being saved? **Acts 2:47:** *“...the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”*
  - (4) That makes perfect sense when one considers what the church is:

**Eph. 1:22-23:** “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is **His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.**”

**Eph. 5:23:** “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and **He is the Savior of the body.**”

**Col. 1:21-22:** “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight...”

D. **8** So far so good: The Lord adds the saved “to the church.”

- (1) But which “church” does the Lord add the saved?
- (2) In our lesson on denominationalism we learned there are thousands of churches.

E. Which one of those thousands of churches does the Lord add saved people to?

- (1) He only has one church! Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:4
- (2) To which church did He add those being saved on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2? The one and only church He built and which He is its Savior!
- (3) The saved are not “added” to any denomination, because denominations are not His church.

F. This truth is confirmed by recalling the “seed principle”:

- (1) Jesus tells us “the seed” that produces Christians is “the word of God” (Lk. 8:11; **1 Peter 1:23:** “...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...”
- (2) How does seed work? It always produces “after its kind” (corn seed produces corn, tomato seed produces tomatoes!).
- (3) When the “incorruptible” “seed...the word of God which lives and abides forever” is planted in the hearts of men and obeyed what does it produce?
- (4) **9** Does it produce Methodists? Presbyterians? Baptists? Catholics? No!
  - ☛ To get Methodists one must plant the *Methodist Discipline*.
  - ☛ To get Presbyterians one must plant the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.
  - ☛ To get Baptists one must plant the *Baptist Manual*.
  - ☛ To get Catholics one must plant the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
  - ☛ To get Disciples of Christ (i.e., Christian Church denomination) one must plant *The Design for the Christian Church*.
- (5) Seed always produces after its kind! Recall corn v. tomatoes. **\*\*Thus God’s Word only produces Christians! Just Christians! Nothing more nothing less! No “hyphenated” Christians!**
- (6) Why can we understand this inviolable principle when it comes to tending our farms and gardens, yet we cannot understand it when it comes to the plain teaching of God’s Word.

### 3. **10** Who is not a Christian?

- A. Hopefully you can already see there’s a vast difference in **Who Is a Christian?** by Bible definition versus the definitions of men.
- B. Men consider the following people as being Christians, but the Bible does not:
  - (1) **Not all good people are Christians:**

- (a) Just because one is a good moral people (kind, considerate, generous, etc.) does not mean they have met the Biblical requirements for being a child of God, a Christian.
  - (b) Being a “good person” doesn’t mean we are destined for heaven when we die (regardless of what is said at nearly every funeral! Grandma Edna).
  - (c) Certainly a true Christian is a “good person.” But being a “good person” in and of itself is not how the Bible defines a Christian.
  - (d) Nicodemus was a good person:
    - ☛ He came to Jesus recognizing “*God is with him*” (Jn. 3:2).
    - ☛ He stood up for Jesus in Jn. 7:50 when Jesus was being criticized by the Pharisees.
    - ☛ He brought the expensive 100 pound mixture of “*myrrh and aloes*” to prepare Jesus’ body for burial (Jn. 19:39).
  - (e) But recall what Jesus told Nicodemus he had to do to “see the kingdom of God”? (Jn. 3:3; 3:5: “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*”)
  - (f) Cornelius was a good man: **Acts 10:1-2**: “*There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.*”
  - (g) But recall that Peter came to Cornelius to “tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.” (Acts 11:14)
  - (h) All true Christians are “good people,” but not all “good people” are Christians.
- (2) **Not all religious people are Christians:**
- (a) Think about it: All most all of the people in the Book of Acts who obeyed the gospel and became Christians were already religious people:
    - ☛ The Pentecostians were “orthodox” Jews (**Acts 2:9-10**: “*Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes...*”),
    - ☛ The Athenians (**Acts 17:22**: “*Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious...*”),
    - ☛ Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 26:5**: “*...according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.*”),
    - ☛ Lydia (**Acts 16:14**: “*Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God.*”),
  - (b) There are two types of religion, pure and vain (Jas. 1:26-27; Matt. 15:9), and most religions are vain and false.
  - (c) The religion of Jesus Christ is extremely exclusive: **Jn. 14:6**: “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*”; Matt. 7:13-14 (many v. few)
  - (d) So, all true Christians are “religious people,” but not all “religious people” are Christians.
- (3) **Not all church members are Christians:**
- (a) Someone said, “Just because you’re sitting in a corn field, does not make you a farmer.”

- (b) This is one of the greatest problems today, thinking one can be a Christian no matter which church you might join or attend.
  - (c) As we've already said many, many times; the Bible speaks of only one church (Eph. 4:4; Matt. 16:18).
  - (d) Jesus is "*the head of the body, the church*" (Col. 1:18) and "*He is the Savior of the body*" (Eph. 5:23).
  - (e) I don't see how anyone can miss that! Only those "*in Christ*," in His body, in His church will be saved.
    - (i) There were only Christians in the first century.
    - (ii) There were no such things as "hyphenated" Christians.
    - (iii) The terms Baptist-Christian, Catholic-Christian, Methodist-Christian, Mormon-Christian, etc. simply did not exist.
    - (iv) \*\* Consider how ridiculous it would be if the apostle John was a member of one denomination while the apostle Peter was a member of another!
    - (v) No denomination can claim any of them today because they were simply members of Christ's church.
  - (f) So, all true Christians are "members of a church," but not all "church members" are Christians.
- (4) **II Not all believers are Christians:**
- (a) "Belief" is the defining characteristic of a Christian:  
**Jn. 3:16:** "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*"  
**Acts 8:37:** "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*"
  - (b) But it might surprise that not all "believers" will be saved:
    - ☛ Demons (**Jas. 2:19:** "*You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble!*"),
    - ☛ Rulers of the Jews (**Jn. 12:42:** "*Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*").
  - (c) To be effective our belief must be coupled with obedience:  
**Jas. 2:19-20, 26:** "*You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*"
  - (d) So, all true Christians are "believers," but not all "believers" are Christians.

### III. CONCLUSION: **12**

1. There is much more that we could say about **Who Is a Christian?**
2. Our lesson has focused on the first steps, the initial steps one must take in order to be "*in Christ*," to become a Christian.
3. Once we become a Christian we must, to simplify things, live our lives as Christ lived His:

**1 Pet. 2:21:** “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps...”

**1 Jn. 2:6:** “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”

**1 Jn. 1:6-7:** “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

**Gal. 2:20:** “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

4. I urge you think this lesson over in your mind; search the Scriptures to if what I’ve taught you today is according to God’s word.

A. If you find it is not, please bring that to my attention. Only the truth can save, not error!

B. If you find it true, I urge you to obey God’s Word and become a Christian.

5. We, or no one else for that matter, has an exclusive franchise when it comes to being a Christian.

A. Anyone willing to do what the Bible says can become a Christian.

B. Only faithful Christians will go to heaven; won’t you become a Christian today?

6. **13** Serious? Yes! 2 Cor. 5:10-11a; 2 Thess. 1:7-9 \*\*\*

☛ Hear: Rom. 10:17,

☛ Believe: Jn. 3:16; Heb. 11:6,

☛ Repent: Acts 17:30-31: “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

☛ Confess Christ: Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

☛ Baptism: Gal. 3:27: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”; Acts 2:38; 22:16

☛ Upon doing those things the Lord Himself will add you to His church, the body of the saved (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23).

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