

What is a Christian?

One recent survey indicates that there are approximately 2 billion Christians in the world today. Yet, despite these supposed large numbers, society seems to be spiraling downward into a moral and ethical morass. This should lead us all to ask the question, “What is a Christian?” The Bible contains God’s definition and description of a Christian. What exactly does it say? How does God define the term Christian? Would He agree that there are really 2 billion Christians in the world? Or are many of those 2 billion going to be surprised and gravely disappointed on judgment day as Jesus said (see Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23).

Who is God?

“Who is God,” is the first thing that you must understand in order to be a Christian. The Bible is the revelation of God to mankind. It is the purpose of the Bible to reveal God to us. Knowing the God Whom it reveals is its own definition of a Christian. “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

Every major religion of the world has a different conception of Who God is and what He is like. Although it is popular today to speak of God in terms that make any personal conception of God equally valid, there is only one God. As we read in John 17:3, an accurate knowledge of who God is determines our eternal destiny.

The Bible says that because of the wonder of His created world every man knows in his heart of hearts that there is a God. “That which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:19-20). Those that deny this are not only called fools (Psalm 14:1) but are suppressing the truth that they know to be true in their conscience (see Romans 1:18).

To be a Christian you must first understand and confess the fact that **God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe**. Everything was created for His pleasure, not for ours. We are just creatures. He is God. “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36). He is the origin of everything, He is the power behind everything, and His glory is the ultimate purpose for everything. But this God who is powerful enough to create the world out of nothing and hold the entire thing together—from a solar system to the smallest atom—is also a personal God. In fact, mankind was created for the express purpose of relating to God, their Creator.

It is also true that **God is Holy**. This is the aspect of God that separates Himself from mankind. The Bible calls Him, “the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

What does it mean to be holy? The word can mean set apart, pure, sanctified, consecrated, perfect, complete, righteous, sinless. All of these ideas are included in this word holy. Holiness is the preeminent characteristic of the nature of God that separates Him from mankind. "Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God" (1 Samuel 6:20)?

Because of His holiness God hates sin. "The wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous" (Psalm 1:5). "The boastful shall not stand before Thine eyes; Thou dost hate all who do iniquity" (Psalm 5:5). Because God is perfectly holy and perfectly just He must punish sin. "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, And the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Nahum 1:3).

While God's holiness is what separates Him from us, what is it that keeps us at such a distance from Him? That is the next question.

What is Sin?

God created us in His own image and likeness. Because of this fact, mankind was created with the wonderful ability of being able to know and communicate directly with God and to have a personal relationship with Him without the stain of sin. Unfortunately, this image and the abilities and privileges that came with it were destroyed when sin entered into the human race through the rebellion of Adam and Eve. Their *sinless* nature immediately became *sinful*, and that nature has been passed down to every person since.

Because of this sin nature our sinful thoughts, desires, attitudes and actions come out of us naturally, often without our even trying. Man is born with this natural inclination toward sin, selfishness and rebellion toward God. "As it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one'" (Romans 3:10-12). "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18).

What is sin? Sin is anything that is done, in our thoughts, attitudes or actions that is contrary to the righteous character of God. Everyone does that. No one is sinless. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

This sin makes the sinner worthy of death and God's punishment. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). "The soul who sins will die" (Ezekiel 18:4). "When lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:15).

Our condition in sin is profound. We cannot avoid it. As a result of it we are all guilty. Unfortunately, God's holy character makes Him unapproachable on our own. And even worse, it demands that He punish sin. Mankind apart from God is really in a helpless state. "Having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). Fortunately for us, God didn't leave us to ourselves. He sent Jesus.

Who is Jesus?

He is God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

He became a man. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14a; cf. Philippians 2:6-7).

He is Lord of all. “God...[has] bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

He is utterly pure and sinless. “In Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

Why is all this important? The importance of these facts has everything to do with what He has done for us.

What has He done?

We are helpless sinners. And because God is holy and righteous and just, He cannot justly allow our sin to go unpunished. However, because our sin was against an eternal and infinite God, it is also an eternal and infinite offense. Because it is an eternal and infinite offense it must be punished eternally and infinitely.

That means that we have to pay an infinite punishment ourselves by spending eternity in hell, or we have to find some other eternal and infinite payment for our sin.

- Because Jesus Christ was God, He is eternal and infinite.
- Because Jesus Christ was man, He can pay the penalty for man’s sin.
- Because Jesus Christ was sinless, He doesn’t have to pay a penalty for His own sin.
- Because He doesn’t have to pay His own penalty God has made it possible for Him to pay ours.

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). “And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24). “And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

No one else has, or ever will, meet the requirement of being a perfect man that has no debt of sin to pay. No one else has, or ever will, meet the requirement of being eternal and infinite so that they could pay an eternal and infinite debt. Jesus was the one innocent man who could pay the penalty for all guilty men because He is both God and man. “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). And to prove that God was satisfied with His payment for sin, He rose from the dead, proving that the penalty of eternal death had been conquered forever.

Guilty people in our legal system often get off free. Our legal system is not always just. In God’s legal system no one can get off free. God is always completely just, which means sins must always be punished. In the death of Christ, as a substitute for us, God satisfies both His holiness and His justice (see Romans 3:23-26). How can this payment for our sin be applied to our account? That is the next question.

What does God require of us?

He requires first of all that we believe all that has been laid out here already.

- We are sinners in the sight of God.

- God is holy and must punish sin in order to be just.
- We could not pay the infinite penalty that we owe for our own sin.
- Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, paid that penalty for us.
- He rose again, proving He was God, and that God the Father was satisfied with His payment for our sin.

Many well meaning people will tell you that all you must do to be a Christian is acknowledge that those facts are true. I would challenge you to answer this question? Which of those facts does the devil not believe? The answer should be obvious. He believes them all! And yet it is certainly true that the devil is not a Christian.

Here is what the devil will not do though. The devil will not ever turn from his sin and turn to serve the living and true God. That kind of repentance is what the apostles called on all men to do. "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent. Because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). And that total turning from the old way of life to a life of service to God is what characterized the early Christians. "You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Being a Christian not only means believing the facts about Jesus Christ's death for sinners. Being a Christian also means being a loyal, dedicated and consecrated follower of that Christ who died for your sins. He cannot be Jesus Christ your sacrifice, unless you know Him and own Him as He truly is—Jesus Christ the Lord of Lords (see again John 17:3; Romans 10:9, 13).

What God requires of all of us is to not only believe those truths about Jesus but also to entrust to Him our entire life—body, soul and strength. Confessing Jesus as Lord does not just mean believe who He was or what He did or even why He did it. The devil believes all that, yet certainly could not be called a Christian. To confess Jesus as Lord means that nothing is held as more important than your commitment to Him. Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-27). "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Mark 8:35-37)?

What is a Christian? A Christian is not just someone who believes the facts, unless the devil is a Christian too. A Christian is someone who believes the facts and recognizes that if those facts are true then his entire life, his entire existence, his every breath needs to be dedicated and set apart to the glory and honor of God. Certainly He is worthy of that loyalty and commitment given the price that He has paid on your behalf. It boils down to whether or not God is the God of your life, or whether you live like YOU are the God of your life.

Now that we understand what a Christian is, it is little wonder that those who have turned to God can be spoken of in such dramatic terms as these. "Therefore if any man

is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). What does God require of us? A belief in all that God has done on our behalf and a wholehearted commitment to love, serve and obey Him. That could be adequately termed “repentant faith.” That is what God requires of us.

“As though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). “For he says, ‘at the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.’ Behold, now is ‘the acceptable time.’ Behold, now is “the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). All of your sins can be washed away; you can be made right with God; you can have the hope of eternal life; you can have the desires of your heart changed through the new birth and regeneration of the life of God. And it is all granted to us freely as a gift from God if we come to Him in repentant faith.

“Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6-7).

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