

What Does it Mean to be a Christian?

1 Peter 4:16

In the 11th chapter of the Book of Acts. The Bible tells us that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Peter would say in first Peter chapter four, verse 16. If any man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but glorify God in this matter. What does it mean to be a Christian? You know, sometimes we hear people talk about being a Christian, or that term is sometimes loosely thrown around.

But what does it really mean to be a Christian? If you look at the word Christian, the suffix on that term *ion*, means belonging to. And so when I affirm that I am a Christian, what I'm saying is that I belong to Christ, that I'm a part of his body. What I want us to do, and I study today for the next few minutes, is to talk about what it really means to be a Christian.

What we want to do is to make a biblical analysis of what Scripture says concerning those who would wear the glorious name Christian. So, number one, when I think about a Christian, I understand that we're talking about someone who has been converted. Converted to Christ. You remember in acts chapter two, we read of the establishment of the Lord's Church.

The Lord had prophesied centuries earlier about the establishment of this divine body. As a matter of fact, the Bible tells us that it would be an eternal kingdom. Jesus made reference to the kingdom of God when he began preaching and teaching. You remember in Matthew four verse 17, the Bible says that Jesus, in concert with the work of John the Baptist, said, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand in Mark chapter nine.

At verse one, the Lord Jesus said that there were some present on that occasion who would not taste death until they saw the kingdom of God come with power. So in the second chapter of the book of Acts, we have the establishment of the Lord's Church. And the Bible tells us that on that great day that the apostles preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

They highlighted the fact that the Lord Jesus had been raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, where he now sits at the right hand of God. He wields all authority because Jesus himself said in Matthew 28 and verse 18, all authority, all power has been given to me in heaven and on earth now. Luke said that on that great day that as a result of the preaching and teaching that occurred, that there were those that were pricked, cut to the heart, they were convicted of sin.

And so they wanted to know men and brethren, what shall we do? Well, Peter said, we have a record of his sermon. But Peter said, repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins. In verse 41, the Bible tells us that those who were receptive to the preaching and teaching on that occurred on that day, some 3000 souls obeyed the gospel.

They were baptized into Christ. In verse 47, the Bible says, the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. So a Christian is someone who has been converted to Christ. That is he or she understands that sin is the problem, that Jesus is the answer. And the only way that we can remedy the problem of sin is through the blood of Christ.

Now we contact that blood by obeying the gospel of Christ, doing what they did on Pentecost day. You can sift throughout the book of Acts, and one of the things that will stand out,

that every person who became a Christian did the exact same thing. They believed in the Lord Jesus. They repented of sin. They confessed the name of Christ, and then they were baptized or immersed in water.

Well, why were they immersed? Well, Peter said, so that their sins might be forgiven. Paul, in recounting his conversion, you remember, he said the next 22, verse 16, that Ananias had instructed him to arise and be baptized, and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. So when we obey the gospel, our sins are forgiven.

They're remitted. We enjoy all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, and the Bible tells us we are added to that divine body called the church or the Kingdom of God. And as a member of the Body of Christ, I am a Christian. If someone were to ask me, what are you religiously? Well, I'm a Christian. I'm not a quote unquote church of Christ.

I belong to the church that Jesus bought with his blood, that he built as he as he acknowledged in Matthew chapter 16, verse 18, but I am not a church of Christ. I'm a Christian. I belong to the body of Christ. And so again, I'm affirming that I belong to the Lord. So, number one, to understand that a Christian is someone who has been converted, but then secondly, a Christian, based upon what Scripture teaches us, a Christian is committed.

We talk about our commitment to the Lord. You remember Jesus said in Matthew 16, in verse 24, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. When I become a child of God, I am committing my life to a person, that is to the person of Jesus. I'm saying that I'm going to commit my life day in and day out to his service.

Paul said in Galatians chapter two verse 20, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me now that's what it means to be a child of God. I'm saying that I'm committing my life to the Lord. Now in Matthew 16, Jesus said that in order for us to become a disciple of his number one, we have to be willing to deny self.

Now, that's not always easy to do. I mean, we live in a day and time when many people. It's all about them. It's about me, myself and I. And yet Jesus said, we have to empty ourselves and we have to be willing to deny self. But then also we have to be willing to die to self. We die to sin.

Yes, we die to self. Listen again to what Jesus said if any man comes after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Paul would say in Galatians, in Galatians chapter six at verse 14, God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

So we're talking about somebody who has committed his or her life to the Lord Jesus. We are willing to put him first in everything that we do. You know, there is an expression used of Caleb in the long ago in the book of Joshua in chapter 14. Caleb, you remember, was one of the 12 spies sent out to survey the land of Canaan.

He and Joshua and the long ago came back and gave a favorable report of the land. But in Joshua chapter 14 it is said of Caleb that he wholly followed the Lord. When I commit my life to Jesus, what I'm saying is I'm going to wholly follow him. I'm going to love him with all of my heart, soul and mind.

I'm going to take to heart what Jesus said in Matthew six, in Matthew six verse 33, when he encouraged, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. That means before anything else, I'm committing my life to his cause, to his ways, and to his will. That's an imperative. So again, I'm giving my life to the Lord. But there's a second thought here.

Number one, I commit myself to a person that's Jesus. But I commit myself also to a purpose. What is my purpose as a child of God? Well, the Bible says that we are to live to God's glory. You remember in Matthew chapter five at verse 16, Jesus talked about how his disciples would be salt and light. And so in Matthew five verse 16, Jesus said in the long ago, you are the light of the world.

A city said on a hill that cannot be hidden. But in verse 16 he would say, let your light so shine as men, that they may that you may glorify your father which is in heaven. And so the idea is that we are glorifying God through our good works. That's the goal. So that's my purpose. And then to make disciples, to teach others what I know that Jesus came to earth, lived among men, died for our sins so that we might have the opportunity to live with him in heaven forevermore.

So I'm committing my life to a purpose. You remember what Solomon said many years ago? That the thrust of life is to fear God, keep his commandments, for this is man's all. In other words, that's what life's all about. And there are a lot of people in the world today they miss that. And there's this huge void or vacuum in life.

And yet what the Bible says is that we're to live to his glory. In Ephesians chapter three verse 21, Paul said that it is the church that glorifies God through Jesus Christ. So, number one, I'm committing my life to a person. Number two, I'm committing my life to a purpose. There is a higher purpose than just serving my own interest and likes.

Rather, my goal is to glorify God, to live in such a way so that my life amplifies what he's done. But then there's a third thought, and that is I'm to commit myself to a place. What place would we be talking about? What place would I be talking about? Well, I would suggest to you that we are committing our lives to a place called heaven.

You remember Paul would say in Philippians chapter three, he talked about some who are minding earthly things. But he said, in contrast to that, our citizenship, our commonwealth is in heaven, whence also we wait for the Savior. In Hebrews chapter 11. The Bible speaks of some of the great men and women of God. And you remember in Hebrews chapter 11, the Bible tells us that these people look for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Their goal was to one day be in that heavenly city. And Hebrews chapter 13, the writer said to the long ago, we have here no continuing city, but we seek that city to come. Now when the Hebrew writer pinned those words, Jerusalem was still standing. The temple was still operating. And yet in AD 70, the city itself was destroyed.

The temple was laid waste. And yet what the writer is saying is that, you know, that city wasn't going to continue, but we're looking toward a city that will stand for ever. Peter tells us that we have an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled faith. Not a way. He said, it's reserved in heaven for you. Now go back and look with me for a moment or two at Matthew chapter six, in that great sermon on the Mount.

One of the great truths that Jesus talked about was how, as one of his disciples, our treasures are not on earth, but are in heaven. He said, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Could I ask a question? Is it possible that we become so comfortable in this world that we really don't care about heaven? I mean, we're so absorbed in our life, our goals, our hobbies.

Our our business and our work and so on that, you know, heaven is just it's really not that important to us. Would it be possible that we're so self-absorbed when it comes to our home,

and how lavish it's furnished, and we're so accustomed to driving our beautiful automobiles and work nice clothes and jewelry. We've got everything on earth that we would ever want.

So why would we want heaven? Well, when I commit my life to the Lord Jesus, I am committing my life to a person. I am committing to a purpose, and I am committing to a place. And that place is called heaven. And if we miss heaven, we miss everything. Now that's what it means to be a child of God in the realm of commitment.

But there's a second thought. Yes, we're converted to Christ. We commit our lives. But then what about conviction? How convicted are you if you're a child of God? Could I ask you, are you genuinely convicted that Jesus Christ is the son of the living God? You know, there are people today. If you were to ask them, what do you think about Jesus?

Remember Jesus while the ancestor of Philip, I ask on one occasion, who to men say that I, the Son of Man, am? There are a lot of people that post that question today and they would say, well, you know, Jesus was a great man. I mean, he was no doubt a great teacher, and he was interested in the plight of the human family, sought to aid those who had been disenfranchized.

And he was seeking to alleviate some of the social injustices of his day. And he demonstrated time and again mercy and compassion and love and grace, etc.. Well, that's true, he did. But listen, you need to understand something more than that. He was and is the Son of God. Do you remember what Peter said when asked that question back in Matthew 16?

Peter said, You're the Christ, the son of the living God. Now that's what we need to believe. Jesus said, except you believe that I am. In other words, unless you come to believe that I am the eternal, self-existent one, he said, you'll die in your sins. And he said, if you die in your sins, where I am there you cannot come.

Do you believe that Jesus is God's only begotten son? We need to believe that we need to be convicted of that great fact. But then also we need to be convicted that Jesus is not just the Son of God, but that he is Lord. Peter said on Pentecost day. Let all the house of Israel. Nor surely that this same Jesus that you crucified God's made both Lord and Christ.

When I say that Jesus is my Lord, what I'm affirming is that he is the one who is ruling and reigning in my life. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and he is the one that is in control of my everyday actions. Have you acknowledged Jesus as your Lord? Paul would say in Philippians chapter two that there's coming a day when every knee shall, every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess to God that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God.

We've often said, and I think it to be the case, we can acknowledge him as Lord today, or we can wait till eternity and acknowledge him there. But the fact of the matter is, we will one day confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. So to understand, Jesus is the Son of God. I've got to be convicted of that.

And you remember in acts chapter four, Peter and John, they had healed a man at the gate of the Temple in Jerusalem, and they were called on the carpet by the Sanhedrin council. And they wanted to know about what power, what name you've done this great miracle. And they affirmed that it was through the power of Christ. And so in verse 12 they said, neither is there salvation in any other.

There is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. And the Bible says that they had the opportunity to behold the boldness of these men. They recognized that they were untrained, uneducated men. But the text says they realized they'd been with Jesus,

and because of that, when threatened and charged not to preach nor teach in the name of Christ.

Do you know what they said? We can't but speak the things we've seen and heard. Now that's conviction. That's the kind of conviction that we need, that Jesus is the Son of God and that he is Lord. But then there's another thought. I need to be convicted, that there is but one church, one divine body, and that the church is singular in nature and all the Savior in that church.

You see, Jesus promised to build the church in Matthew 16:18, and he did. Jesus not only built the church, he bought it with his blood. And there's but one church. Now, I understand that we live in a day and time when religious division exist, and there are literally thousands of different denominational bodies. The church that Jesus built and bought is under nomination.

It is predetermined. There's just one, because in Ephesians chapter four Paul said, there's one body and one spirit, even as you're called in one hope of your calling. Somebody might ask the question, well, what's the body? Well, Paul answers that in verses 20 and 21, in Ephesians chapter one, Paul said, he put all things in subjection under his feet, made him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

So the church and the body are one and the same. There's just one church, there's just one body, and there's just one head. Well, who's the head of the church? Well, Paul said in Colossians 1:18, he's the head of the body of the church. So there's only one body in one church. And in Colossians 1:18 Paul said, concerning Christ and the church, which is the beginning, and the idea is that Jesus was the active source from whence the church came into being.

We need to believe that we need to have conviction that there is only one church, that Jesus is the head of that one church, and all the saved are in that one body. Well, how do I know that all the Savior in the one body? Well, in Acts chapter two, those who had been baptized into Christ were added to the church.

Acts two, verse 47 Paul said in Ephesians five, verse 23, talking about Christ. He is the Savior of the body. What's the body? He's the head of the body of the church. So Jesus has promised to save whom? Only those who are in his divine body. So I have to have conviction that Jesus is the Son of God, that he is Lord, that he has established the one church.

And I also need to have conviction in this book that I call the Bible. Do you believe that the Bible is the inspired and errant Word of God? Oh, I know what people say. There are folks today. They'll say, you know, the Bible is just a bunch of fables. I mean, there's really nothing to it. It's just a collection of writings generated by mankind.

Not so. No. Paul said all scripture, every scripture, is in spite of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, for correction, instruction, and righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped unto every good work. I need to believe that Peter said, Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. This is the inspired word of the living God.

If we want to know something about salvation, we have to understand that this is the book of all books, and this is the only book that can point us in the direction of a relationship with Christ. To enjoy his cleansing blood and to be a part of his body. Now that's pretty special, isn't it? That's why in John chapter six, you remember when Jesus identified

himself as the bread of life, that living bread that came down from heaven?

And John said that many people walked away, no longer followed the Lord Jesus. Jesus then turned to the 12 and he asked this question, Will you also go away and listen to what Peter said? Peter said, Lord, to whom shall we go? For you have the words of life eternal. What do people need in our world today? They need this book that's called the Bible.

Why? Because this book has the words of life eternal. And I need to have conviction. I need to believe that this is indeed the Word of God. It is inspired. It is inherent and it is instructive. It's given so that I might be blessed in this life and enjoy relationship with the Lord. So we talk about our commitment to Christ.

Our conviction in Christ. But then what about our courage in Christ? Our courage in the Lord? Now we're talking about what constitutes a Christian. What is a Christian? When I go back and I read in the New Testament about those early disciples, one of the things that is abundantly clear is that these men and women were people of courage.

We need courage today. I fear that sometimes in the church, we lack the courage and the conviction to stand up for what we believe. You know, we live in a world, as John said, that's filled with darkness. He would say the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one in verse. John five verse 19. We live in a crooked and perverse generation of people.

That's what Peter rather, that's what Paul would say in Philippians chapter two. The world that we live in is as crooked as a barrel of snakes. And the only thing that's going to get us on the straight and narrow is the Word of God. But we have to have the courage to stand for truth. Now, that requires a couple of things.

Number one, I've got to be brave. And number two, I've got to be bold. Bold in my defense of divine truth. You remember back in the book of Daniel, in chapter three, we read about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar had erected a golden image 90ft high, nine feet wide. And the edict was that unless people bowed before that golden image, they would be cast into a fiery burning furnace.

Well, let me tell you what Shadrach and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they would not bow. And they told King Nebuchadnezzar, they said, look, our God is able to deliver us, and he will deliver us. But if he doesn't, you need to understand something. We are not going to bow down and serve your God this golden image. Let me say this.

That is that is brave and that's bold. And those men were thrust into a burning fiery furnace. They didn't die, but they had the conviction and the courage to stand for what was right. You have that same kind of courage in acts chapter four. I mentioned a moment ago Peter and John threatened not to preach nor teach in the name of Christ anymore.

And yet the Bible says their response was, we cannot but speak the things we've seen and heard. That's bravery. But then you remember, after having been released by the council, they went back to the other disciples and rehearsed what had occurred. And the Bible says that they prayed to God, and they prayed that with all boldness they might speak His word was our world need today.

Our world needs Christians who are willing to stand up and be counted. Paul said, have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reproof them. The world that we live in is dominated by the devil, and the devil is doing everything he can to destroy that which is right and pure and holy. And oh yeah, we live in a world that's filled with spiritual darkness.

But it takes Christians, men and women who have been converted to Christ, who are committed to Christ, who have conviction, who are courageous enough in spite of what might come to stand up and say, this is what's right, and we're not going to back down. I mean, we live in a day and time when people are hostile toward Christianity, toward the Bible.

And yet if we shrink in standing for what's right, then ultimately evil will try them. Somebody said on one occasion, all that's necessary for evil to try is for good people to do nothing. You go back and you read about those early saints in the long ago, and those folks were willing to stand. And I mean, they stood no matter what some of the apostles put to death.

You remember James, the brother of John, put to death by Herod with the sword. Acts 12 Peter imprisoned. I mean, we could go back and look at all these accounts. Let me share with you another thought very quickly as we look at the life of a Christian. I want to close by saying we ought to be people of confidence.

Number one, confident in our relationship to the Lord. John said that those of us who belong to the body of Christ, that if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of His Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin. To realize that I maintain a relationship with the Lord based upon striving to the best of my ability to walk in harmony with His Word.

And when I do that, then I have the assurance that the blood of Jesus is constantly at work in my life. Well, somebody says, well, what happens if you mess up? What happens if you stumble and fall? Well, John said, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous. We can go before his throne, acknowledge our wrongdoing, repent of that, and he will forgive us.

First John one verse nine. And then very quickly to understand that we have a reward in Christ. Paul said as he near death, there's later for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me, and not to me only, but also to all who love. Disappearing. As a child of God, I can have confidence that if I live for the Lord, one day he will own me and crown me, and I'll be with him forevermore.

God bless you.