



What is a CHRISTIAN?

— by Peter Hammond

Most South Africans claim their 'religion' to be Christian, yet have never surrendered to Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Once and for all we lay down the Biblical criteria.

Much of the opposition and criticism Christians receive is due to ignorance and misunderstanding of what a Christian actually is. From the very beginning there were false accusations against Christians in the Roman Empire.

Christians were accused of cannibalism! “You Christians eat the flesh and drink the blood of people during your ceremonies!” Because the Lord’s Supper symbolically refers to eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Lord Jesus, certain Romans, either out of ignorance or malice, spread the rumour that the Christians were actually involved in human sacrifice and cannibalism!

Christians were accused of incest! “You Christians marry your brothers and sisters!” As Christians referred to everyone in the Church as their “brothers” and “sisters” in Christ, outsiders misunderstood this Spiritual brotherhood and accused believers of marrying close relatives.

It may surprise you to know that for the first three centuries of the Christian Church believers were accused of Atheism! Because Christians refused to worship the gods of Rome, they were attacked as ‘Atheists’!

Historical facts

Christians were also accused of lack of patriotism and treason! For refusing to worship the emperor Christians were condemned as ‘traitors’. It is worth noting that the early Christians were not persecuted for worshipping the Lord Jesus. The Romans were polytheists, they believed in many gods and did not care which gods were worshipped. The ‘crime’ of the early Church was that they refused to worship the State.

Preaching against sin has often been regarded as anti-social behaviour. By steadfastly campaigning for an end to the slave trade and slavery itself, Christians were perceived as radical and a threat to the social order. In the wake of the great Evangelical Awakenings and Revivals, bars and brothels closed down and those who made their living by enticing poor people to gamble suffered a dramatic loss in ‘business’. Today the opposition of Christians to pornography, perversion and abortion provokes similar hostility.

Widespread Ignorance

However, quite aside from the distortions caused by anti-Christian propaganda, there is also a widespread ignorance of what a Christian really is. It is natural that people should be outraged at the extravagance of some high-profile ‘Christians’ such as televangelists. All Christians share the general disgust at hypocrisy and



"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." Matt 16:24

scandals. However, the Lord Jesus declared: *"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."* Matt 7:21

Christianity is all about Christ. It is not about nominal Christians, ministers and denominations. Cults idolise leaders. Religions follow ritual. But true Christians have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."* Matt 16:24

Webster's dictionary distinguishes between nominal Christians and real Christians. A nominal Christian is defined as: "A believer in the religion of Christ. A professor in his belief in the religion of Christ." However, Webster's dictionary then makes it clear what a real Christian is: "A real disciple of Christ is one who believes in the truth of the Christian religion, studies to follow the example and obey the precepts of Christ. A believer in Christ who is characterised by real piety... relating to Christ."

Followers of Jesus

The word Christian only appears in the Bible twice. In the Book of Acts Christians are most often described as: "Disciples", "Believers" and "Followers of the Way."

Many people who today claim to be Christians, or are assumed to be Christians, cannot accurately be described as Disciples or Followers of the Way, because they are not under the discipline of Christ, nor do they seek to follow His example and obey His commands. Neither can many of the theologians who train ministers be called Believers. If they deny the inerrancy of Scripture and don't believe in the Deity of Christ and the Trinity, in many cases even doubting or denying the existence of God Himself, can they in any sense be called Believers? So, what does the Bible actually teach as to what a Christian truly is? The attitudes and actions which should characterise the Christian are made clear by what we are called to be and what we must do.

A Christian is a disciple

A disciple is one who gives up everything; denies himself; takes up his cross and follows the example of Jesus. Disciples are identified by their dedication to the Word of God and love for the people of God. *"Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be my Disciple."* Luke 14: 27

A Christian is a free man

The Word of God is the Truth that sets us free. A Christian is someone who has surrendered to the Word of God and received the freedom that can only come through Christ. Millions of Christians worldwide can testify of how the Lord Jesus freed them from addictions to smoking, drunkenness, gambling and drugs. As the converted slave trader John Newton testified in his famous hymn, Amazing Grace: "Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound, that»

A Christian is not someone who talks about God or wears a cross. You can't be born a Christian. Neither can you claim to follow God without submitting to His Son, Jesus.

5 TYPES OF 'CHRISTIANS'

Active Christians

- Believe in salvation
- Committed churchgoers
- Bible readers
- Share their faith

Professing Christians

- Believe in salvation
- Less involved in church,
- Less commitment to Bible reading or sharing faith

Liturgical Christians

- Catholic and Anglican
- Regular churchgoers
- High level of spiritual activity, expressed by serving in church and/or community
- Limited knowledge and application of the Bible

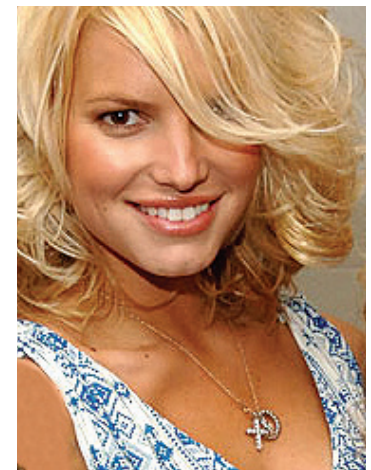
Private Christians

- Youngest segment
- Believe in God & doing good things
- Own a Bible, but don't read it
- Spiritual interest, but not within church context
- Only 1/3 attend church
- Almost none are church leaders

Cultural Christians

- Limited religious behaviour
- God aware, but little personal involvement with God
- Don't view Jesus as essential to salvation
- Affirm many ways to God

Findings from a survey by Leadership Magazine and Christianity Today Magazine in the USA (2008)



Wearing a cross around your neck, does not make you a Christian. In fact, in some quarters it has simply been reduced to a fashion statement



Above: Hollywood celebrities wearing their 'fashion symbols'

saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now I am found, was blind, but now I see... Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come; 'tis Grace has brought me safe thus far, and Grace will lead me home." Christians are freed from slavery to sin and Satan, to subservience to the world's pressures and to conformity to public opinion. We are set free to serve Christ.

"Freedom is what we have – Christ has set us free; stand then as free people, and do not allow yourself to become slaves again." Gal 5:1

A Christian is a servant

Jesus declared that He came to serve and we are to follow His example and be concerned above all else with meeting the needs of others. *"Let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions, and in truth."* John 3:18

A Christian is an athlete

We have to keep ourselves in training for a Godly life, doing Spiritual exercises. We are to rid ourselves of all unnecessary weight and free ourselves from all known sin, throwing aside every encumbrance and running with determination and endurance. *"Run in such a way as to get the prize... a crown that will last forever."* 1 Cor. 9:24-25

A Christian is a worker

As workers for the Lord, we are always to do our best, wholeheartedly and everything we do is to be done in love. *"Keep busy always in your work for the Lord, since you know that nothing you do in the Lord's service is ever useless."* 1 Cor. 15:58

A Christian is a soldier

We have a spiritual enemy to fight. We have a spiritual war to win. We are to be disciplined, motivated, obedient, prepared, alert and to use the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. We need to fight evil; resist the devil; bind the powers of evil; enforce the victory of the cross; attack the strongholds of the enemy; storm the gates of hell; set the prisoners free and win the victory in Jesus Name. *"We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."* Rom 8:37

Christians are also called to be light for the world

As Jesus is the Light of the world, so Christians are to reflect the light of Christ to a dark world. *"This is to my Father's glory that you may bear much fruit so you will be My disciples."* John 15:8

From all of these Scriptural word-pictures of what a Christian should be, it becomes clear that many of the modern misconceptions concerning what a Christian is, are



Public proclamation does not make you a Christian - being Born-again does. (John 3:3)

inadequate. The superficial, shallow, one-dimensional concept of 'Just open the door of your heart' brand of half-hearted, churchianity is lukewarm, wishy-washy and weak. Any Biblical definition of a Christian must include: action, devotion, dedication, perseverance, sacrifice and service. *"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me, scatters abroad."* Matt 12:30

Two Choices

A Christian is one who is born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. He has a real relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He loves the Lord Jesus with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength. And he seeks to serve and honour Christ in all areas of life. Jesus Christ made it clear that there are two roads – the broad road and the narrow road. There are two gates – the wide gate and the narrow gate. There are two trees – the bad tree which bears the fruit of the flesh: pride, greed, lust, jealousy, envy, bitterness and hatred, and the good tree which bears good fruit: *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* Gal 5:19-23.

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Josh 24:15. ■

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