

## What is a Christian?

The term “Christian” or “Christians” is only used three times in the Bible. The first of these is Acts 11:26 which tells us “The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.” Notice it says the “*disciples* were first called Christians.” Earlier, Jesus had told his Apostles “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make *disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...” A Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ having been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In general, a disciple is a person who patterns his or her life after someone else. A disciple of Christ, then, is someone who patterns his or her life after Jesus Christ. The term *disciple* is used much more frequently in the New Testament than Christian, and describes these people who patterned their life after Jesus. It is easy to see why people in Antioch would call these followers of Jesus Christ merely as “*Christians*.”

The other two passages using the term “Christian” are Acts 26:28 where we find a King named Agrippa responding to the Apostle Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian.” And, 1 Peter 4:16 where the Apostle Peter wrote, “...if you suffer as a Christian” as he addressed the potential persecution of the churches of his day in the territory of modern day Turkey.

## Why become a Christian?

Christ said in a discussion with a group of Jewish leaders, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free...I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:31-32, 34-36. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul wrote, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The advantage of following Christ as His disciple is freedom from sin. The consequence of sin is eternal punishment. Those who are Christ’s disciples escape this eternal punishment as a gift from God. Consider some of these other passages:

### Concerning sin and those who reject Jesus Christ

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” Romans 3:23

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...” Romans 5:12-13

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” John 5:28-29

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

1 Corinthians 5:10

“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.”

2 Thessalonians 1:8-10

### Concerning Jesus Christ’s Love

“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

1 John 4:9-10

“...just at the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.... But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...”

Romans 5:6-8

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my father.”

John 10:11 & 17-18

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”

John 1:29

### How does this fit together?

All men and women sin and along with that sin come the consequences of both a physical and spiritual, eternal death. But God loves us so much that he sent his one and only son to die in our place. That son is Jesus Christ. Through his death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus saves his disciples from this spiritual, eternal death. The greatest advantage of being a Christian is an escape from the consequence of this death.

## How Christ's Death, Burial, and Resurrection Saves His Disciples

First, we need to understand that when God created man, he made man without sin but with the ability to choose between obeying God or his own desire. He made a perfect environment for man including a loving familial relationship. Apparently, man could walk and talk with God in this paradise called the Garden of Eden. All of this is recorded in Genesis 1-2. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve – the first man and woman – decided to follow their own desire to eat a fruit which God commanded them not eat (Genesis 2:15, 3:1-6).

The Apostle Paul tells us that as a result of this act, sin enter the world and along with sin came death (Romans 5:12). Indeed, Genesis records God remarks to Adam, "...until you return to the ground since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19). But God also cast Adam and Eve out of this perfect environment and from his presence (Genesis 3:23). Paul tells that as a result of sin "all men die because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Second, we need to understand men do not die for their parents' sins or those of Adam – men die both physically and spiritually for their own sin. This spiritual death is a separation from God's presence. And so Paul writes regarding Christians, "Since we have now been justified by his [Jesus'] blood how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were **reconciled** to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Romans 5:9-10) [Emphasis added]. Reconcile means "to re-establish friendship between."<sup>1</sup> So whereas the sins of men separates or make men enemies of God, Christ's sacrifice of his own life brings men back into a friendship relationship with God.

Paul says a little later (Romans 6:1-10):

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives he lives to God."

In other words, when Christ died and was raised; he was raised in the newness of life never to die again. Those who have been baptized, we are told, were united with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Thus, just as Jesus Christ was raised from the dead never to die again, so too are we baptized never to die again.

---

<sup>1</sup> Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary, Boston: Houghton, 1984 (p. 983).

## **What This Means for My Life**

Jesus told those Jewish leaders in John 8 “if you keep my teaching...,” and, he told his Apostles in Matthew 28:18-20, “make disciples of all nations baptizing them...and teaching them to obey all that I commanded you..” So, being a disciple means not only accepting the gift of life, but also following the teachings of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul continued his discussion in Romans 6 with these words:

In the same way count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then, Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:11-18).

In other words, once you become a disciple of Christ, you should live for God and strive not to sin. You should not be a slave to sin any longer. That does not mean you will never make a mistake or sin, but you are living for God – being pleasing to him is your goal. Notice 1 John 1:5-9:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

From this, we know that it is impossible to live completely without sin; but, if each person acknowledges his or her own sin, God will forgive that person who is trying to “walk in the light.” Walking in the light is what those who want to have a fellowship with God do. In contrast, it is possible for someone to outright reject Jesus Christ even after becoming a disciple or Christian. Notice what is written in the book of Hebrews 10:26-29:

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of

raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the Law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him and who has insulted the spirit of Grace.

Notice this person has been “sanctified” by “the blood of the covenant;” a reference to Jesus’ blood. So this person was a Christian at one point but apparently has now rejected Jesus – the only valid sacrifice for his or her sin.

What this all means is that a person who follows Jesus is saved from his or her sins, and seeks to pattern his or her life after Christ. Even when a person stumbles, God will forgive him or her and the end result is eternal life. But eternal punishment awaits for anyone who refuses to follow Christ.

#### Other Benefits...

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” 2 Peter 1:3

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Ephesians 1:3

“For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.” Hebrews 9:24

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ... Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.” Galatians 3:26 & 4:6-7

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:6-7