

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian

According to <http://www.religioustolerance.org> about 2 billion people in the world consider themselves Christians. That is about 30%. Divided among those 2 billion people are about 38000 denominations. The denominations can be categorized into 3 major ones. Roman Catholicism is the largest with over a billion adherents. The second is Protestantism consisting of thousands of denominations has 500 million adherents. Eastern Orthodox is the smallest with 225 million followers.

With so many different denominations, how can anyone know what it means to be a Christian? The beauty of Christianity is that it's not defined by a religion, it is defined by Christ. To find out what Christianity really is, all we must do is look into the Bible and see what it says.

What Bible Should We Read?

This is sometimes a common question. The quick answer is: It doesn't really matter. I would recommend the NASB (New American Standard Bible) because it is the easiest to read. Many People use the KJV (King James Version) because it is old and in the public domain, but I wouldn't recommend it just because Old English is hard to follow.

2 Timothy 3:16 "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." Inspired by God literally means God's breathed. The Bible is the Word of God. It should be our authority in everything we do.

Where Should we Start Reading?

If you are just starting out reading the Bible, I would suggest the Gospels, because they deal with what Jesus did and said while He was here on earth. The book of John may be the ideal book to start out on because John "wrote it so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in His name" John 20:31. But for the sake of better understanding, in this document, we will start with the beginning, Genesis.

The Beginning of Time

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Genesis 1:26-27 says, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Genesis 1:31 concludes with, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

Genesis 2:16-17 says, "And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'"

Genesis 3:6 records, “When the woman saw the fruit, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband and he ate.”

This is the first sin in the Bible, and just as God had promised, they did die. Genesis 5:5 records Adam’s death. Death is the consequence of sin. God says that “the wages of sin is death” – Romans 6:23

What was the result of Adam’s sin?

In Romans 5:12 Paul says, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, death spread to all men, because all have sinned.”

This is the first key point in Christianity. Everyone is a sinner

Have you ever lied or stolen something? Irrespective of its value? Those are the 8th and 9th commandments. Have you ever used God’s name in vain? That is the 3rd commandment. That is called blasphemy. Have you used God’s name as a curse word or to represent disgust? God says he will not hold anyone guiltless who blasphemes His name.

Have you ever lusted after someone? Jesus says, “I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” If you have ever looked with lust then God sees you as an adulterer. That’s the 7th commandment.

Have you ever hated anyone? 1 John 3:15 says, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” If you have ever hated anyone, God sees that as bad as murder. That’s the 6th commandment.

This seems like pretty steep judgment. It gets worse this was only 5 of the 613 commandments in God’s Law. As you can see no one is perfect, no one is even close to that.

If you’ve broken God’s Law, you cannot inherit eternal life. God is a perfect and righteous judge; He must judge sinners. God says the penalty for sin is death: eternal separation from God in hell. Romans 6:23.

The second key point in Christianity is that Jesus died for our sins

According to this the situation looks grim. Being perfect, God must judge sinners. The Bible says in Romans 3:23 that everyone has sinned. If that’s the case, how can anyone go to heaven?

Romans 3:21 says, “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been made known.” Jesus Christ kept the whole Law and yet He died. He died to pay your penalty. Since He was perfect, He didn’t have to pay a penalty of death, He could pay your penalty.

Think of yourself in a courtroom. You are guilty of a serious crime and the sentence is a \$1,000,000 fine or life in prison. You don’t have the money so the judge has to send you to jail. Then someone you don’t even know steps up and says he’ll pay the fine for you. The judge

counts the money and sees that there is \$1,000,000 there. He then says that your fine has been paid and you are free to go.

That is what Jesus did for us at the cross. We are guilty before God of breaking His Law, and we have nothing to offer as payment for that. God then, because he is a righteous judge, has to sentence us to death, but before he does that Jesus said, "I'll pay their penalty; I'll die for them." God then sees that as adequate payment for our sins.

The third key point of Christianity is that you must believe in Jesus Christ

You may have heard, "Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved." But what does that really mean? Most of the time people do a very poor job of explaining this. What does it mean to believe? What are we being saved from?

Basically it's this: You must start by believing that you are a sinner. As we stated earlier everyone is a sinner and we have proved it with the 10 commandments. Then you must believe that Jesus, though he was perfect, died to pay the penalty for your sins. Believing in Jesus means believing that He was capable of paying your penalty. Anyone can say that they'll die for your sins, but only someone who is perfect can legally pay that penalty. You must also believe that Jesus was God. Like I said before, anyone can say that they'll die for your sins, but God can truly pay for them. Jesus proved Himself to be God by rising from the dead three days later on Easter.

That's what it means to believe in Jesus. You must believe you are a sinner and that Jesus was God in human form, lived a perfect life, and died on your behalf. Then three days later rose from the dead. One you do that you will be saved, or freed from the power and penalty of sin, Hell.

The Beginning of a New Life

That is basically how to become a Christian. Once you believe on Jesus Christ, you are what some people call "born again" a phrase from John 3:3. What does it mean to be born again? By becoming a Christian, God has changed you. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Ezekiel 36:26 says God will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. What the Bible is saying is that when you are born again, God changes your desires. You want to do good and please Him.

This is not to say that Christians are perfect. We don't always do the right thing, but it should be our goal and our desire to be perfect. Paul says in Philippians 3:12, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own." Even the Apostle Paul was not perfect, but he strived to become so. Why? Because Jesus saved him. Why do Christians want to please and glorify God? Because He loved us and gave Himself up to death for us.

Daily Living

What are we supposed to do now that we have been born again? Christians are not called to leave the world, but He has called us to be lights to the world. Our purpose is to give glory to God.

Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” We are called to live our lives, but now we live them for God.

We are also called to share the Gospel: the good news that Jesus did die for your sins. Mark 16:15 says, “And He (Jesus) said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” It is our duty and our joy to tell others about Christ.

The Church

Believers in Jesus Christ make up what is called the universal church. The church is just all the believers on earth. Christians should also be a part of a local church. A local church is usually what people think of when someone “goes to church”. It is a body of believers who learn about and serve God together.

A local church is powered by Spiritual Gifts. A Spiritual Gift is an ability that Christ gives to every Christian. A list of the spiritual gifts can be found in 1 Corinthians 12:1-14. Other lists can be found in Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11. The purpose of the spiritual gifts is found in Ephesians 4:12, “to equip His (God’s) people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

A church needs a pastor to teach the congregation, that is one of the spiritual gifts. Another gift is giving, to help those financially less fortunate. There are also gifts of leading and ministering in the church, and gifts of serving behind the scenes, or gifts of exhortation for those who are going through hard times. But all of these gifts are to help the people of God grow in faith and become more like Him.

If one is a believer in Jesus Christ they have a gift to use to serve God and other believers. If they are not a part of a local church they really should become so. It is a blessing to have a group of believers to serve and also for them to serve you, and in doing so grow closer to God.

To Wrap It All Up

What does it mean to be a Christian? I have talked to hundreds of people who would consider themselves Christians, but don’t even understand the basic Gospel truths that I explained earlier. Most people think being a Christian means growing up in Christian home, going to church every Sunday, giving money to the church; being an all-around good person, and when they die God will allow them into Heaven.

That’s not what it means to be a Christian. Being a Christian means acknowledging that there is no way you could ever be good enough for God to allow you into Heaven. To be a Christian, you must fall on the mercy of God and trust fully in Him to save you. Only then can you be acceptable to God. And because, though we deserved death in hell God saved us, we want to thank Him and give honor to Him. That is what it means to be a Christian; we live for Him because He died for us.