

The Gospel for 'Christians'

Introduction

I often have conversations with sincere religious people who think that they are a Christian because they are religious, or go to a church, or pray occasionally, or believe in Christian ethics, or have a high view of Jesus Christ. Such people are usually decent, peaceable, pleasant, considerate folk; but the conversations are always difficult because it is necessary to challenge their worldview and make them uncomfortable so that they can see the real Gospel. Some people have stopped talking to me as a result.

Yet Jesus was far harder than I am when dealing with this sort of situation.

This paper is an attempt to explain the Gospel to such religious folk. Since they mostly ignore the apostolic writings and often mistrust Paul, I will expound the truth mainly by the words of Jesus, whom they purport to follow, and the Gospels (a few other texts will be necessary).

The danger of thinking that you are a Christian when you are not

Jesus warned his followers, many times, that on the Day of Judgment there will be many that claimed to have followed him but were fakes and would be cast into hell.

Often these warnings were put into parables, such as the seed that initially grew but then withered, or the man that built a house on the sand. But Jesus also warned us about this in very clear dogmatic terms; for example:

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. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Matt 7:21-23

These verses alone warn us to be vigorous to make certain that the Gospel we believe is the real Christian Gospel and not some poor substitute, of which there are many.¹

In fact, Jesus affirmed that the vast majority of people who hear the Gospel message will be in hell and only a minority will be truly saved.

For many are called, but few chosen. Matt 20:16

For many are called, but few *are* chosen. Matt 22:14

¹ 2 Cor 11:4, 'For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted -- you may well put up with it!' Gal 1:6, 'I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel'.

Since many will be shocked at the end, it thus behoves you to make certain that your faith is genuine, that your religion is pure and that you really do have a relationship with God through Christ. You must examine yourself; test yourself.

Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless indeed you are disqualified. 2 Cor 13:5

This means understanding certain things.

What is a Christian?

If you are going to call yourself a Christian then you need to know what a Christian is. It is no good having a mere traditional or social understanding of this, or making up your own definition.

A Christian is not:

Someone who goes to church.

Many go to church who do not believe in Christ while there are many false churches; there is even a church of Satan.

Someone who prays.

Many pray who not only do not believe in Christ but who hate Christ. Some pray to false gods.

Someone who reads the Bible.

Millions have read the Bible that had no faith in God at all. Many liberal theologians read the Bible but wrote against God's truth. Even the devil has read the Bible many times and quoted it to Jesus.

Someone who practices Christian ethics.

Good works cannot save. No man can get to heaven by doing good.

Someone who has visions of God.

This is just another form of human works but more subjective. Many have had visions of what they thought was God but then did evil things proving it was not God at all.

Someone who worships Mary.

This is idolatry. Only God should be worshipped through Christ.

Someone who has been healed by prayer.

Most healings prove to be false or temporary relief from pain due to an adrenaline rush. Healing is not a qualification for salvation. Physical healing, even if genuine, is not soul healing.

Someone who has fallen over in a trance at a meeting.

Such falling is common in false religions and the occult. It is actually proof of submission to hypnotic suggestion and over-emotionalism. Such mysticism is not conversion.

Someone who has made a commitment after attending some evangelistic course.

A person may become a Christian as a result of a good course if they have had the experiences we will explain next. However, large proportions of supposed converts from such courses prove later to be false. Mere attendance at a course proves nothing in itself. Furthermore, many such courses are very unbiblical.

Someone who came forward at an evangelistic meeting or raised a hand.

I have lost count of the number of people I have known that did this and later proved not to be Christians at all. This is the error of decisionism, or salvation by will-power; human choice. This is the same as salvation by works and is false.

A Christian is a disciple

A Christian is a follower, or disciple, of Christ.

And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Acts 11:26

This means that you need to know what the Lord Jesus Christ says a follower (disciple) needs to be.

No other definition is correct; the Bible (which is the word of Christ) tells us that a disciple is a Christian; therefore we need to know what a disciple is and what he must do.

What is a disciple?

'Disciple' is the Greek word *mathetes*, which means 'a learner, pupil, disciple'. A disciple is a pupil of a master, a follower of a teacher, someone who does his master's bidding.

Therefore the essence of a Christian disciple is someone who obeys the Lord Jesus.

A supposed Christian that does not obey Jesus cannot, therefore, be a disciple. Jesus affirmed this:

If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. Jn 8:31

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love. Jn 15:10

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. Jn 15:14

Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say? Lk 6:46

The apostle that Jesus loved also affirmed this many years later:

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. 1 Jn 5:3

This means that a disciple is someone who adheres to his master's teachings and obeys all that he says. This means also that a disciple knows his master's teachings; thus for a Christian this means understanding what Christ taught, not only during his lifetime but also through his disciples from heaven.

The notion that a disciple of Christ can think, speak and act contrary to what Christ commands is anathema.

Conclusion

The hordes of churchgoers who flagrantly disobey multiple commands of Christ cannot be disciples. Disciples are principally seen in the fruit that they bear which testifies to Christ.

How do you become a disciple?

Regeneration

Being born again from above

Disciples are born not made. You don't become a disciple by human choice.

Jesus made this very clear in John's Gospel.

Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'. Jn 3:3

Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again"'. Jn 3:5-7

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. Jn 3:8

The beginning of becoming a disciple is the action of God upon a chosen person giving him new life. This is called being 'born again' or in theological terms, 'regeneration'. All the New Testament testifies to this prior necessity before conversion.²

The whole point of being born again is that becoming a disciple is not a work of man, it is not a decision you make. It is a response to the action of God by the Spirit.

What is being born again?

It is receiving a new kind of life.

The life of human beings is derived from Adam by natural generation ('born of water'). This is a sinful life as a result of the Fall in Eden where Adam and Eve fell into sin as a result of following the devil, severing their fellowship with God.

All fallen mankind lives in a state of depravity due to being born in sin. This means every faculty of man is corrupted, even if the person is not fully expressing this corruption. Jesus said to the Jews:

You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. Jn 8:44

The total depravity of man after the Fall had been expressed in the Bible from the earliest times and throughout history.

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Gen 6:5

The fool has said in his heart, '*There is* no God'. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; *there is* none who does good, no, not one. Ps 14:1-3

God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are *any* who understand, who seek God. Every one of them has turned aside; they have together become corrupt; *there is* none who does good, no, not one. Ps 53: 2-3³

² Paul also explains this as follows: Eph 2:1, 'And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins'. Titus 3:5-6, 'He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour'. James (the Lord's brother) explains it thus: Jm 1:18, 'Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth'. Peter: 1 Pt 1:3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'. John: 1 Jn 3:9, 'Whoever has been born of God does not sin'. 1 Jn 5:1, 'Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God'. Thus the Lord and his apostles all agree on the necessity of regeneration. Any supposed Christian that disagrees with this or knows nothing of it by experience, therefore, cannot be a true Christian.

³ Total depravity does not mean that men are as wicked as they can be; appallingly evil. It means that every faculty of the heart has been corrupted by sin and the soul is dominated by selfishness rather than serving God. Some men express more of this iniquity than others, but all are depraved.

Jesus came to bring a new kind of life, eternal life, which is not derived from Adam but is from above, from God. The entrance into this eternal life is by being born again.

Jesus and the Gospel writers often spoke about the new life he would bring:

Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. Jn 3:15

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. Jn 5:39-40

Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. Jn 6:54

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. Jn 6:63

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. Jn 10:28

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. Jn 17:3

So, being a Christian involves having an entirely new kind of life, a spiritual life that is eternal. If you do not have this eternal life that is in Christ you cannot be a Christian.

This life carries its own affections, gifts and characteristics, which are from Christ. We will examine some of these later. In practical terms this life brings changes to the convert. For example, before I was a Christian I swore a great deal. After I received new life I stopped swearing instantly, never to habitually swear again – this was not the result of my will-power.

Calling

Those who are chosen by God ('election')⁴ are called in time to receive eternal life. This calling is the Gospel preached by Christians.

There are two aspects to this calling.

The first is a universal calling to all men indiscriminately to believe in Christ and repent. This is a general call, a demand from God to get right with him.

Within the general call is an effectual call. This is when the Spirit identifies the elect and calls to them in a powerful and effective manner within the general call.

This is why, when the Gospel is preached to a crowd of people, only a proportion respond with faith.

The effectual call of the Spirit brings irresistible grace to God's chosen people. In specific terms, the effectual call gives faith and repentance to those chosen by God.

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. Jn 3:8

⁴ The doctrine of election is the selection, or choosing, by God in eternity of some men to be saved. If God had not done this all men would have been condemned. The choosing in the past is applied by the calling of the Holy Spirit in the present.

Faith

Since faith is a gift of God (Eph 2:8-10), believing in Christ follows regeneration. We are not able to believe in Christ until God has acted upon us and given us heavenly faith.

Receiving Christ

Believing in Christ is equivalent to receiving Christ:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Jn 1:12-13

Here John emphasises that believing or receiving Christ follows being born of God.

Justification

Conversion occurs after faith has been expressed; that is, believing into Christ for salvation. The first result of faith in Christ is justification, or being set free from condemnation to hell.⁵

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Jn 3:18

Eternal life

Eternal life is also a consequence of believing in Christ:

Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Jn 11:26

Thus eternal life is received as an immediate consequence of faith.

False belief

There are many forms of false faith. Often people think that mere intellectual assent or acceptance of truth is faith, but this is mere human belief. Human belief is not heavenly faith. Human faith accepts that chairs are made of atoms and molecules but this faith cannot save. Only the faith given by God can open the door of heaven.

Thus believing that Christ existed is not divine faith and cannot save. Believing that Christ was the Son of God is not true faith; even demons had this faith.⁶ Believing that Christ is the Saviour for the world is not true faith; many in false religions accept this.

True faith occurs when a person believes that Christ has died for him in particular and then rejoices in salvation gained by this faith.

True faith is the apprehension of divine power given to the elect.

Repentance

This is also a gift of God's grace. Repentance is a grace given to those who have been born again and represents a complete change of life direction. It is a new way of thinking so that personal actions are no longer based on selfishness but upon the words of Christ.

Thus repentance is often spoken as a turning in Scripture. It is turning around of one's life to follow Christ instead of doing what you want.

⁵ Paul explains the doctrine of justification by faith in Romans 4-5. In summary it is the removal of guilt caused by sins and the giving of legal righteousness to be able to stand holy in heaven. It is a formal declaration of no condemnation.

⁶ Mk 3:11, 'And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God"'.

Repentance begins as a change of mind, and turning of man's thinking. His views on morality are different. As a result of this his actions change from having a sinful disposition to having a godly disposition.

Christians can still make mistakes, but the direction of their life changed when they repented so that they are determined to follow Christ.

Repentance is a ceasing to follow your own whims and a commitment to follow Christ and obey his words. Someone who claims to have faith but has no change of life direction cannot be a Christian.

Conversion

'Conversion' is the word used to describe those people who have been converted from sinners to Christians. It is a summary word for the subjective and objective actions of conversion, namely faith and repentance.

A convert is a disciple of Christ who has believed in Christ and turned around to follow him.

Conclusion

Churchgoers who have not been born again, who have not received Christ, who have not received faith and who have not repented cannot be disciples. They have not been converted from being a sinner in Adam to a believer in Christ.

If you don't know whether you have been born again or not, then the likelihood is that you have not since regeneration is a life-changing experience.

Characteristics of the Christian disciple

Submission to Christ as Lord and God

Part of the change resulting from true repentance is a deep submission to, and worship of, Jesus; along with a deep love of God.

This submission is a constant yielding of the mind to what Jesus wants of us.

There are some who contend that a sinner can become a true Christian but not submit to Christ as Lord in daily life. This is a lie and many texts in the NT prove this. Jesus even demanded that a disciple carry his cross and deny himself in his commitment to God. This is figurative language for submission.

Conversion always produces a deep love for the Lord Jesus above all other things. The glory of knowing that the Son of God yielded up his life to save me is a fundamental basis for loving and worshipping Christ forevermore. Any lack of love and worship for Jesus is a warning sign that conversion is not genuine.

You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. Jn 13:13

And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed'. Jn 20:28-29

Knowing what sin is

The corollary of submitting to Christ is understanding the iniquity of sin and shunning lawlessness.

We will examine this more as we look at how a disciple behaves, but here we simply make the point that, for the first time, the Christian understands the awfulness of sin and how it offends God. A true Christian will seek to avoid sin, even if he makes mistakes, and hates the idea of offending God his Father.

Anyone who continues to behave as he always has before cannot be a Christian. Conversion marks a huge change in morals and behaviour by revealing the horror of sin. A lack of understanding what constitutes sin is proof that a person is not a Christian.

Union with Christ

The great change that occurs at conversion is that the sinner ceases to be part of Adam and is united to Christ. Paul explained this in doctrinal terms but Jesus teaches it more figuratively:

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. Jn 4:14

And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst'. Jn 6:35

Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven -- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever'. Jn 6:53-58

The Christian is a person whose life is now subsumed into Christ. He has spiritual life, eternal life, he is not a normal human being any more.

In the end, at the return of Christ, the believer will have a changed body to go with this inner spiritual life that he has now, and thus will be prepared for an eternity in heaven in perfection. Meanwhile, now, Christians must believe that they are changed people that have eternal life, and wait for their Saviour from heaven.

Peace with God

Peace with God comes as a result of justification, or pardon from sins. Being forgiven of all sin means that a believer has peace and knows that he is right with God. Whatever mistakes he makes, the true Christian will always return to God in sorrow and confession, and will always be forgiven.

God is no longer a wrathful judge, ready to condemn our sin. For the Christian God is a loving heavenly Father who cherishes and protects his children and sees them through to the end.

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Jn 14:27

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. Jn 16:33

Anyone that claims to be a Christian but does not have assurance that God is his Father cannot be a disciple of Christ.⁷ The whole point of salvation is that Christ has made a new and living way to approach God the Father.⁸

Assurance of hope

The hope of the true Christian has no uncertainty, no unbelief. It is certain faith that God will preserve him to the end and bring him forth blameless.⁹

It is the understanding that the salvation begun by God in regeneration will continue to sanctification (holiness) and glorification.¹⁰

It includes the understanding of a bodily resurrection on the last day when Christ returns for his people in glory.¹¹

The end of salvation is the declaration that the Christian is not guilty before the judgment seat of God at the final judgment and formal bodily admission into the family of God with authority. This is the consummation of salvation.¹²

The fulfilment of the Christian hope is that he will be present on a newly restored earth where all trace of sin has been erased. It is where God will dwell with man in perfect holiness and harmony and where there will be no sadness, no pain and men live forevermore in blessedness serving God.¹³

The centre of that peace is the Lord Jesus Christ. The hope is founded in him and we have hope because we are in him.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope by grace. 2 Thess 2:16

The Lord Jesus Christ, our hope. 1 Tim 1:1

What does a disciple do?

Devotions

A Christian will want to spend time with God alone every day. Although he may pray constantly throughout the day as the need arises, he will allot a portion of the day to reading the Bible systematically and praying. Most people find that first thing in the morning is a good time to do this to start the day aright. Some have this 'Quiet-time' in the evening as well. The psalmists prayed three times a day.

⁷ There may be a few exceptions to this, such as a true Christian that has mental problems or depression due to sickness. In history a few believers have suffered in this way.

⁸ Heb 10:19-20, 'Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh'.

⁹ Jn 10:28-29, 'I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand'.

¹⁰ 1 Thess 5:23, 'Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

¹¹ Titus 2:13, 'looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ'.

¹ Pt 1:13, 'rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ'.

¹² Rm 8:1, '*there is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit'.

¹³ 2 Pt 3:13, 'we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells'.

The Lord's Prayer is an example of the structure daily prayer will take. This is not meant to be recited parrot fashion; it is a scaffold on which to base prayer: coming to the Father; worship; prayer for God's glory; request for daily needs of myself and others, forgiveness, doxology (praise to God).

Thanksgiving

The Christian will want to give thanks to God constantly for his inexpressible gift of salvation in Christ. All prayer should be tinged with thanksgiving.

Work

All work performed by the Christian can be sanctified by prayer and commitment to God. This means that even menial chores can glorify God if you are doing them as unto him. This is the basis of the Protestant work ethic that characterised Western Christian nations and brought them prosperity.

If you do your work as a service to God he will reward you for all work.

Giving

The true disciple is a giving person who does all he can to do good to others within his limitations. This can be expressed in multiple ways: hospitality, advice, practical aid, giving money, being a listener and many more.

Relationships

The world

The Christian has a new attitude to relationships with the world. He is aware of the pitfalls that can arise and the danger of inappropriate fellowship. He will seek to do good to all and will be a good friend to his neighbours.

He will not avoid friends, especially old friends, but will always seek to distance himself from unsavoury behaviour. He will explain that he has been converted and seek to evangelise as God gives opportunity (he will not bash people over the head with it relentlessly). Usually old friends will accept this but occasionally some will sever friendship.

There are some things that he will change upon conversion. Habits that were sinful or suspicious will stop. For example, a man who formerly read newspapers with naked women pictured in them will stop reading that newspaper.

The Biblical idiom that prevails is that we are in the world but not of it.

In general the new Christian realises that the world is not his home anymore. His hopes and plans cease to be based on worldly values.

The church

The Christian convert has become a member of a new family. This means that suddenly he is a brother to the millions of Christians in the world.

The reality is that Christians share a spiritual bond that is felt even the very first time that they meet each other. Thus a convert will seek to meet with his brethren whenever possible.

This means that a new believer will seek to join a good Christian church in order to fellowship with his brethren and learn from them. In time he will learn to help and

encourage others in this fellowship. Church is a place of giving and receiving according to God's grace.

However, modern times of apostasy have meant that many good Christians find that there is no local church that they can meet with. Some have no evangelical (Biblical) church at all within easy reach, while others do have churches that claim to be Biblical but these are full of heresy and aberrations. Thus many today find that they are cut off from decent fellowship.

This is a significant problem, but it is one that Scripture warned us would happen. The convert in this situation must do whatever he can to get whatever fellowship he can. In addition he can read good teaching books, listen to good teaching audios and DVDs, go to good conferences and keep in close contact with Christian friends.

If a new church arises which is faithful to Christ, then he can attend this. Alternatively, if he has good Christian friends locally they can gather to meet for prayer and encouragement.

If he finds himself in the situation where there are Christians at his workplace, a lunchtime prayer meeting can be arranged in that workplace.

Ethics

I explain Christian behaviour in a moment.

In essence, a true Christian has a renewed sense of moral responsibilities that have a high priority in his life. For example previous obvious, gross sins are utterly shunned after conversion; such as swearing, stealing, fornicating and such like. It is common to find that converted criminals completely cease criminal behaviour immediately. Often former criminals start ministries to help disadvantaged people like they used to be.

Confession of sin

Christians are not perfect in this life; that holiness is only possible in the new world when the old nature has been removed and we are completely sanctified at the appearing of Christ. All the time that we have an old nature (the ground of temptation to sin) in this world, perfection is impossible.

This means that Christians sin. As time progresses, and as we are gradually progressively sanctified, we should sin less and less.

Yet mistakes and failings will occur. When this happens the Christian will immediately confess his sin to God, say sorry and ask to be cleansed afresh by the blood of Jesus.¹⁴ Upon confession the soul is cleansed and spiritual life continues. If we fail to do this God will discipline us as a Father in order to bring our testimony in line. God never stops loving us as our Father, but he will chastise us if we fail to accept our need to confess sin.¹⁵

¹⁴ 1 Jn 1:8-9, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'.

¹⁵ Heb 12:5-6, 'And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives".'

What does a disciple believe?

Life for the Christian is a constant adventure in the Spirit. It is a constant growing in understanding and knowledge about God and his laws. We could enumerate all the doctrines that a Christian should grow into, but these would require a book on theology.

Essentially we can strip it down to this:

God

The true Christian believes absolutely in God and grows in his understanding of God's character and attributes, as well as his works.

A Christian will have a basic awareness that God is a Trinity; that the First Person is God the Father who initiates salvation (election or choosing); the Second Person is God the Son who achieves salvation (redemption); the Third Person is the Holy Spirit who applies salvation (conversion and sanctification).

The Bible

The true Christian believes that the Bible is the very words of God and the expression of Christ. He refuses to bow down to men who ridicule certain parts of Scripture and believes all of it. This includes creation in six days; all the miracles and the resurrection of Christ. Since it is the word of God, the Christian constantly looks to it for understanding and direction by reading it every day and studying it carefully.

Prayer

The Christian believes in the reality of prayer; that he can communicate with God. He also believes that God will answer his prayers according to his will and direct him in various ways. These include God speaking to the disciple through the Bible, other Christians or circumstances.

Church

The Christian believes that he is closely attached to all other Christian believers and that they form one family of God and one body in Christ. He will thus be loyal and faithful to all other believers as a result, seeking to do good to them wherever possible.

Warfare

The true Christian understands that he is in a fight. He knows that there is a constant heavenly warfare between God and the devil and he understands his part in that fight.

It is amazing how many people affirm that they believe in God but refuse to believe in a personal devil. The Christian is not so foolish and understands that he must resist the devil and his temptations day by day.

Part of that warfare is the struggle to deny temptation and to flee sin.

Hell

The Christian understands that hell is real and that it is a place of eternal condemnation and torment. He knows that it is reserved for the devil, all his fallen angels (demons) and all men who follow him and sin against God.

The future

The Christian, no matter how weak, understands that there is a glorious future for all the sons of God and that Jesus is his only hope. He knows that this world is passing away and

that Jesus will return in glory to judge the living and the dead. After this there is a renewing of the earth and all believers will dwell with God forever.

How does a disciple behave?

I have seen so-called 'Christians' behave in all sorts of ways that are flagrantly sinful. This proves that they cannot be believers at all. I have seen such 'Christians': cheat the taxman, commit adultery, commit fornication, steal, swear, blaspheme, lie, cheat, explode in fits of rage and anger, get drunk regularly, leave wives and children, walk away from genuine Christian friends, wallow in self-pity, and much more.

All of this proves that such folk cannot be Christians because they are not obeying Christ and not following Christ.

The behaviour of a true Christian is laid out in all the ethical teaching of the New Testament, which we cannot delineate here. In the simplest terms we can say that a Christian will manifest the life of Christ and this is laid out in its barest form as the fruit of the Spirit; i.e.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Gal 5:22-23

Since the Spirit's job is to glorify Christ (Jn 16:14), the fruit of the Spirit is the fruit of Christ's character.

The reason that the Christian can behave as Christ behaved is that the Christian has crucified the flesh, has died to the flesh when he was converted so that sin no longer reigns over him.

Those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Gal 5:24-25

Jesus spoke about this in figurative terms as taking up your cross and in clear terms in commanding self-denial.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it'. Matt 16:24-25, Mk 8:34-35, Lk 9:23-24

Take up the cross, and follow Me. Mk 10:21

Self-denial is thus a central; characteristic of Christian behaviour. This undergirds everything in the personality: you please God and not yourself.

This is expressed in both passive and active forms. Thus a true Christian will not wallow in self-pity and focus upon himself, seeking sympathy from everyone, because he practices self-denial. A Christian will not bear grudges against anyone, even his enemies. A Christian will only be angry at sin and injustice but will not allow himself to indulge in anger as a result of offences against himself. A Christian will tolerate attacks, slander, castigation and even violence against himself. A Christian will repay evil with good. A Christian will constantly seek to find new ways to do good to everyone. A Christian will always fulfil his responsibilities to his family. We could go on.

In short, a true believer will act like Christ.

What should I do if I want to become a Christian?

If regeneration is a sovereign work of God and not man, how do I become a Christian?

Jesus gives us great encouragement here. He tells us that those who seek God will find him, that those who knock on the door of heaven will have it opened that those who seek the water of life will find it.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Matt 7:7-8

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart. Lk 18:1

It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. Rev 21:6

And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. Rev 22:17

In fact, the very seeking of God from desperation for salvation is an indicator that God is already working in your life. Unbelievers have no desire to find God.

Turn to God now in prayer and seek him. Knock on the door of heaven. Throw yourself upon the mercy of God and cry for forgiveness.

Don't trust in yourself at all; don't trust in any action of your own. Seek the mercy of God in Christ.

Read the Bible and seek God, casting all your cares upon him.

Conclusion

A Christian is not what the world says it is, it is what Jesus says it is. His own words make it clear that a Christian is someone that has been born again, has believed into Christ and has repented from sin and turned to God.

It is someone who has had a life-changing, spiritual, heavenly experience and has met with Christ in the Spirit.

A Christian is someone who knows that his sins are forgiven in Christ with no uncertainty.

A Christian is someone who has assurance of eternal life.

A Christian is someone who knows God and believes the Bible implicitly.

A Christian is someone who has a hope for the future that is stronger than any ties he has on earth today.

A Christian is a member of the family of God, part of the body of Christ and a co-heir with Christ.

Only the word of God is good enough authority to say what a Christian is. Any lesser definition is false and will lead people into hell. God's word fully explains what a Christian is and that foundation is sure and steadfast.

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