

# What It Really Means To Be A Christian - Part 1

*Explore Your Faith Teaching Series - Explo-1* ©

With Pastor Joseph Rodrigues

## OUTLINE

### Introduction

This study is imperative for all who profess Christianity. It issues a challenge, as Paul did in 2Cor.13:5 to “examine yourselves whether you be in the faith”.

The study explores many popular misconceptions about Christianity and about becoming a Christian.

It reminds us of the duties, expectations, and responsibilities that accompany being a ‘Christian’.

It examines misconceptions critically. A clear demarcation between the ‘professor’ and the true ‘believer’ is established.

There is no greater need right now than to alert those who *think* they are Christians, but are not! This is an issue of paramount importance because it touches our eternal state. As Paul said, “test yourselves”.

This topic is divided into two parts.

This first part deals with who a Christian IS.: that is, what establishes one as a Christian.

The second part deals with how a Christian LIVES.

### Ever Been Challenged To Describe Your Faith?

Before you can explain what Christianity is, you need to have given the matter some thought yourself! *Many Christians pay surprisingly little attention to the **content** of their faith.* They concentrate upon experiencing God through prayer, bible reading, and worship. Now this is not a bad thing. But it does mean that you neglect an aspect of being a Christian which is important- and that is being able to explain *what Christians believe and why.* In the end, Christian faith comes about not by becoming convinced about the truths of some arguments, but by meeting the risen Christ. Nevertheless, whilst your arguments may not bring someone to the faith they may well remove obstacles in the path of that faith.

We are to be signposts (just like John the Baptist and Phillip).

Misunderstandings about the faith may include intellectual obstacles such as doubts about the fundamental love of God or his goodness; or even a reluctance to admit being a sinner. We can deal with these obstacles if we have proper understanding ourselves. So let’s consider the following.

### 1. Some Popular Misconceptions about Christianity

**a) Jesus came to set up Christianity** (or another way of saying Jesus was the founder of Christianity, another faith that superseded the Jewish faith. (Q. Why did he come?) (What happened? how did the gospel come to us gentiles?). See *Romans*

*There is value in knowing our heritage.* The NT is the OT revealed and the OT is the NT concealed!

The first use of the name “Christians” was at Syrian Antioch (*Acts 11:26*) in a derogatory sense, so that initially it was more a nickname than anything else. Antioch was the first church with a significant pure-gentile, ex-pagan element; that is, the first place where pagans would see Christianity as something *other than* a Jewish sect. Christians called “followers of the way”; later identified as ‘belonging to Christ’.

**b) Christianity is a religious institution designed around moral or ethical codes.**

On the contrary, Christianity is a way of living in **a restored relationship** (communion) with a **personal** God. This is where Christianity differs from every other religion at grass roots level.

**c) Christianity is simply a creed (a set of beliefs)** Many ‘Christians’ are content to live according to this understanding!

On the contrary, Christianity involves action. Our intellectual beliefs may be beyond criticism; but we must translate our beliefs into deeds; “faith without works is dead” (James).

Christianity is not simply giving mental assent to Christ’s divine person, or the acknowledgment of man’s need of salvation, or the Christian belief that Christ is the Saviour. So, what’s involved in being a Christian? We must commit ourselves, heart, mind, soul and will, home and life, personally and

unreservedly to Jesus Christ. We must humble ourselves before him. We must trust in him as our saviour, submit to him as our lord; and then go on to take our place as faithful members of the church and responsible members of the community. The sort of relationship is described by use of the Greek word translated 'know' used about 42 times in 1 **John**, and characterized by obedience (*1John:2 ff*)

## 2. Some Popular Misconceptions about What Makes a Christian

- a) Being born into a Christian environment
- b) Going to church
- c) Living a good life
- d) Praying
- e) Reading the bible
- f) Receiving a sacrament
- g) Talking about Jesus
- g) Giving to the poor
- h) Believing in the existence of God

(Good and helpful as these are, they do not in themselves establish you as a Christian.)

## 3. The Truth about a Christian

Becoming a Christian necessitates **new birth**; there is no other way (*John 3:3*)

*The term 'Born-again Christian' is actually a misnomer.* To be a Christian one must first be born again; there is no other category; you can't be 'partly Christian' (i.e., be a Christian and *then* be born again)

Becoming a Christian involves a willful and wholehearted decision to take the following steps:

1. **Repent** - this means acknowledging your sinfulness has separated you from God and asking his forgiveness

Death was your portion (*Rom.6: 23*)

You ask forgiveness for falling short of God's standard (*Rom.3.23*)

2. **Believe** - this means you believe what Christ has done for you on the cross is sufficient for your restoration to God

His death brought you to God (*1Pe.3: 18*); an exchange took place; his righteousness for our unrighteousness

3. **Confess** - this means you confess Jesus Christ as **LORD** (*Rom.10: 9,10*); it involves your mouth (stating it openly); it involves your heart (not reasoning or mental assent)

**Becoming a Christian is not an event but the beginning of a lifestyle. In other words, the Christian adopts a lifestyle of repentance, a lifestyle of believing, and a lifestyle of confession until death! Paul exhorts us to do this "otherwise you have believed in vain" (see 1 Cor.15: 1, 2; Heb. 3:14). Salvation is evidenced by continuing in faith to the end.**

## A "Christian" in a nutshell

1. One who is born into God's family (*John 1:12,13*)

2. One who walks in the way of life - *John 14:6* (Jesus is) not the way of death- (*Matt.7: 13,14* - (broad Vs narrow)

This means: the way of peace (*John 14:27*); the way of love (*John 13:35; 1 John 3:14*); the way of obedience-as a servant to a master-Jesus is LORD of lords and KING of kings (*Rev.17: 14*)

3. One who enters into eternal life and a *fuller* and *more complete life* **right now** (*1 John 4:12; John 10:28*)

## Marks of the Christian

1. A Saint meaning set apart / different / holy; fellow-citizen (*Eph. 2:19*)
2. A Son- spiritual life begins with spiritual birth; this is a miracle worked by God; Sonship is the result (*John 3:6*); emphasis is on what *one has become*.
3. A Soldier- Christian is a soldier; church is the army  
Implied in Paul's charge to Timothy (*1 Tim1:18; 1Tim6:12; & 2 Tim2: 3*)  
Has an opponent who attacks physically (*Lk.13: 11,12*); mentally (*2 Cor. 4:4*); & spiritually (*Eph.6: 12*)

4. A Steward- means responsibility (*Lk.16: 1,2*)  
Required to be trustworthy (*1 Cor. 4:1*)  
To be employed for other's welfare (*1 Pe.4: 10*)  
Will be rewarded accordingly (*Matt 25:16-28; 2 Cor. 5:10*)  
To use gifts, talents, time etc. wisely; recognize limits (*Mk.6: 31*)
5. A VIP Ephesians 2 note emphasis '**were...but now**' (*verses 1,13*)  
A new creation (*2 Cor 5:17*) (not an improvement but an **innovation**)  
A chosen people / royal priesthood (*1 Pe.2: 9*)

Note aspect of reigning (**power**)(*2 Tim.2: 12*)

-Reigns by overcoming the world (*1 Jn. 5:4*)

-Reigns by crucifying the flesh (*Gal. 5:24*)

-Reigns by resisting the devil (*Jas. 4:7*)

Note aspect of Priest - Access to God's presence (*Eph.3: 12; Heb.10: 19-22*)

#### Other Analogies used of the Christian

1. A sheep John 10 : 3 ff; Psalm 23 - (utterly dependent on shepherd)
2. A stone 1 Peter 2:4,5 (a key scripture-living stones)
3. An athlete 2 Tim 2:5-(not to break the rules, to be disciplined)
4. A farmer 2 Tim 2:6-(not to evade the burden)
5. A workman 2 Tim 2:15-(not to be lazy or careless)
6. A vessel 2 Tim 2:20-22-(not to be polluted)
7. A servant 2 Tim 2: 24-25-(not to assert oneself)

#### 4. Areas In Which We Need To Be Firmly Grounded

1) About God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit 2) About sin; 3) About Christ's work of redemption; 4) About salvation; and 5) About retribution. All of these areas God tells us about in his Word.

#### Why do we need to have sound understanding in these areas

Two reasons:

1. So that we can live life abundantly and victoriously (think about this!)

2. So that we can discern error:

The earliest Christian creeds were formulated because of these dangers (e.g. Nicene Creed).

Early heresies:

*Ebionism*- denied Christ's deity

*Gnosticism*- denied Christ's humanity

*Arianism*-taught that Christ was a created being

*Appolinarianism*-denied the completeness of Christ's human nature

*Nestorianism*- denied the union of two natures in Christ, reducing him to a man filled with God

*Eutychnianism*- denied the distinction of the two natures of Christ, thus making a third or hybrid nature of the two

*Monophysitism*- denied the two natures and wills in the one person of Christ

What is man saying that is contrary in each of these areas?

1. *New age philosophies*: these imbibe the philosophies of

Monism - with its concept of Vedic Hinduism (Gk. *Monos* = single); therefore ultimate reality is a single independent whole without independent parts. 'New age' is a western expression of monism; it affirms the external world is really there, it is not an illusion;

*Pantheism* with its belief that God is all in all, or that all that exists is an extension of God's essence. Apart from God there is no reality; therefore it imbues the material world with consciousness

*Mystical humanism*, with its claims to the new age man having attained godhood;

*Occult philosophy* with its deceptive pseudo-scientific terminology (yoga, spiritism, visualization, witchcraft, etc.)

*Cosmic consciousness* with its attendant mystical states and higher or extended consciousness including channelling, T.M. etc)

2. *False teachers* (wolves in sheep's clothing) e.g. Episcopalian Bishop Spong; dispensing with the resurrection/ virgin birth etc

3. *Cults claiming to be "Christian"*, e.g.; Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Scientists, The Way International (literally hundreds of others!)

**5. Other Foundational Doctrines We Need To Understand (See Hebrews 6:1, 2).** These are dealt with in other EXPLO studies.

**6. Summary and Conclusions**

## What It Really Means To Be A Christian - Part 2

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### OUTLINE

#### Introduction

We started this segment with exploring some basic truths about Christianity, which set it apart from any other faith. In particular, we examined popular misconceptions about Christianity and on becoming a Christian or being 'born again'.

It is appropriate to conclude this segment with some reflection on what it means to *be a Christian*. Becoming a Christian is one thing; but *being* a Christian is another. It is this aspect that we will concern ourselves with in this session.

*Consider this:* when you were born, you received a new independent personality. So also, when you were 'born again' you became a *spiritually* new person. We use the term 'born again' synonymously with being "in Christ", or to signify this renewal as being the occasion of being made 'a child of God'.

But (you may be thinking) is not God the Father of all men? Are not all people the children of God? **NO!** The Bible clearly distinguishes between a general paternity of God which extends over all whom he has made, and a restricted fatherhood which is enjoyed by those whom he has remade in Christ. He is the creator of all; *but he is the Father only of those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their Saviour.*

**John 1: 11-13** brings this out clearly. The three clauses beginning with the relative pronoun 'who' all describe the same people. The children of God are those who are born of God; and those who are born of God are those who have received Christ into their lives and who have believed in His name (that is, in everything that his name stands for and accomplishes).

**If then we want to understand what, according to the Bible, it means to be a Christian, we must grasp the privileges and responsibilities of the child of God.**

#### 1. The privileges of the child of God

##### a. *An intimate relationship*

Consider the barrier that was between God and us because of sin; the just condemnation that we should receive from the judge of all the earth but now our acceptance through Christ. *The judge has become our Father!*

Now he chastens and corrects us with a loving father's hand (**Heb 12:6; cf. Prov. 3:12**). He may punish us in this life, *even to the point of taking our lives, but we are not condemned!*

### **B** *An assured relationship*

We ought to be assured of our relationship with God not just for the sake of our own peace of mind and helpfulness to others, but because **God means us to be sure!** John says this categorically in his first Epistle chapter 5, Verse 13.

We are not to rely on *feelings*, because they do not accurately reflect our spiritual condition. The basis of our knowledge that we are in relationship with God is not our feelings, **but the fact that He says we are!**

**1. His word in the Bible.** (All of His promises, for example: **Jn.6:37; 10:28; 1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 13:5, 6; 1 Jn. 1:9**, to name a few).

**2. His word in our heart** (Rom. 5:5; 8:15, 16). The outward witness of the Holy Spirit in Scripture confirmed by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit in experience.

**3. His word as seen in our lives.** The same Spirit who bears witness to our sonship and experience completes his testimony in our character. St John applies this test ruthlessly in his first Epistle. If any man continues to disobey the commandments of God and to disregard his duties to his fellow men, he is not a Christian, whatever his profession may be. Righteousness of life and practical love to one's neighbours, especially to one's Christian bretheren, are indispensable marks of the true child of God.

### **c.** *A secure relationship*

Supposing we have entered into this intimate relationship with God, and are assured of it by God's own word, is it a secure relationship? Or can we be born into God's family one moment and repudiated from it the next? The Bible indicates that it is a permanent relationship (SEE **Rom. 8:17**)

*Consider this:* So what happens when we sin? Do we forfeit sonship and cease to be God's child?

-*Relationship* remains unchanged; *fellowship* is broken! The first depends on birth, the second depends on behaviour. Forgiveness restores fellowship (**1 Jn. 1:9; 2:1, 2**).

We are justified **once**, but we need to be forgiven **every day!** Jesus illustrated this truth when he washed the disciples' feet (Jn. 13: 9, 10). This is the provision of every believer who struggles with sin and battles to overcome it; is quick to confess and ask God's forgiveness.

**WARNING!! We must keep in mind that our attitude towards sin is important in this regard. If we sin high-handedly, that is, with a total disregard for god, and have no desire whatsoever towards changing sinful patterns, we give evidence of not being truly saved.**

## **2. The responsibilities of the child of God**

Just as the great privilege of the child of God is relationship, so **the great responsibility of the child is growth.** *Everybody loves children, but nobody in their right mind wants them to stay in the nursery!*

Our birth must be followed by growth! Important scriptures relating to this: **1 Pe. 2:2; Col. 1:28; 1 Cor. 3:1, 2.**

God requires growth in two areas; in understanding and in holiness. (*Consider what this means*).

The question is: *how shall we grow? Consider the following:*

-In duty to God: Our relationship with our Father though secure, **is not** static!

-In duty to the church: our Christian life **is not** our private affair! Fellowship is not a Sunday treat!

-In duty to witness to the world. Though not specifically called to be a missionary or evangelist, every Christian has an obligation to be a witness to Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion and question time.**

