

Lesson 6

What Does it Mean to be a Christian?

“Christian” has become an ambiguous as well as deceptive term today. When someone says he/she is a Christian, he/she may mean many things. However, when the Bible says “Christian,” it uses a specific definition – a disciple of Christ. The purpose of this lesson is to teach the Bible’s explanation of what it means to be a disciple of Christ – a Christian.

What is a Christian?

Acts 11:26 *A Christian is a disciple of Christ.*

1. What do you think most people mean when they use the word, “Christian?” *A good person or someone who goes to church occasionally. Who does God say is a Christian? A disciple of Christ.*
2. The name “Christian” is what those outside the church called disciples of Christ. The Bible only uses “Christian” a couple of times. “Disciple” is used 269 times. Why does this matter? *Because when we say “Christian” today, it can mean whatever someone wants. When we say “disciple,” it still carries a very specific meaning.*

Luke 6:40 *The goal of the disciple is to be just like the teacher.*

1. By definition a disciple or student has the goal of becoming just like the teacher. How is that definition different than that of a student today? *Today, students learn information and may not even agree with it or believe it. A disciple not only believes the teacher’s teaching, but seeks to be completely obedient to it.*
2. What do you think Jesus means by “fully trained?” *Jesus gave specific examples, commands, and lessons to teach us how to feel, think, and behave. When one follows them, one becomes more like Jesus (See II Corinthians 3:18) and is thereby trained.*

Luke 9:22-26 *Here is the core of following Jesus.*

1. Note verses 21-22. What did Jesus say was to happen to him? *He must suffer, be killed, and raised again. From what we learned in previous studies, why did it have to happen? Jesus was to die for our sins so we could live eternally.*
2. What is the meaning of the phrase, “come after me?” *To be a disciple or follower.*
3. What does “deny self” mean? *To give up living for yourself and trying to find “life” by any human means. This will require sacrifices of some things the flesh desires, but it is a bigger deal than just not doing certain things.*
4. Explain “take up your cross.” *The cross was an instrument used to punish by execution. Jesus was executed for my (your) sins. To follow him, we must be “executed” daily from living for self. (See also II Corinthians 5:14,15 and Galatians 2:20)*
5. What does “follow me” mean from his perspective? *To become like him in purpose (for God), in person (God’s essential nature), and in passion (zealous).*

6. How do we save our life by losing it and lose it by trying to save it? *When we try to live life our way, we follow our own desires and get lost for eternity. When we give up on our way and live God's way, we find eternal salvation.*

Luke 14:25-33

God refuses to stand in line for our love and He refuses to be a "part" of our lives — it's all or none!

1. Why do you suppose Jesus would preach such a powerful and potentially confusing lesson to such a large crowd? *Because God only wants those who are really serious. He does not want the half-hearted. (See also Revelation 3:15 and Jeremiah 29:13)*
2. Why does Jesus tell us we must hate those "nearest and dearest" to us in order to be a disciple? *There can be no rivals to God in our lives. Jesus uses the word hate to tell us how our commitment to others should compare to our commitment to God. There can be no rivals!*
3. Why must we first estimate or count the cost of our becoming a disciple? *Because if we think it's cheap and easy, we are more likely to give up and quit. We must prepare ourselves mentally for the new life we've chosen.*
4. Why do you suppose we must give up everything to be a disciple? *Because anything I "own" "owns" me. All I am and have becomes a "trust" of God's and I am the trustee. I determine how to act and live by asking what Jesus wants me to do.*

Authentic Christianity

Matthew 7:21-23

Not all Christians are true disciples.

1. What does Jesus say is not, by itself, enough to be saved? *Calling Jesus Lord and calling on his name.*
2. Who does Jesus say is an authentic Christian? *Those who do the Father's will.*
3. What is the implication? *Doing the will of God involves more than calling myself a Christian and calling on Jesus as Lord.*
4. Describe the people of verse 22. *They called Jesus Lord, called on the power of his name to prophecy, drove out demons, and performed miracles. They considered themselves Christians and even seemed sincere in that they are surprised at their condemnation.*
5. Are there many or few of these? *Many. (See also Matthew 7:13,14)*
6. Were they ever saved? *No, because Jesus had never known them.*
7. Are they good people who are simply misguided? *No, they're evil-doers.*
8. How can this be? *None of us can be good by our own right. We've sinned and that makes us candidates for eternal death row. Being a Christian is not about our goodness – it's about God's. It's not about our greatness or our good deeds – it's about trusting and being faithful. It's about simple, exact obedience. Play the game God's way.*

1 John 2:3-6

The true test of authentic discipleship is in obedience.

1. Do we know we're a Christian by how we "feel," what we think, or by knowing and obeying Christ? *By knowing and obeying Christ.*
2. What about "Christians" who aren't obeying God? *They're living a lie.*

3. Doesn't an all out effort to obey constitute "legalism?" *Legalism is believing I earn a relationship to God by obedience – it's trusting in my own attainment. However, rigorous obedience grows out of a serious trust in God! (James 2:14-26)*
4. How does John say God's love is completed in us? *When we do God's will, we are being loving, because His will is always loving. We, alone, can't even figure out what is truly loving to God and to others.*
5. What does it mean to "walk as Jesus did?" *It means to live the way he lived, to feel as he felt, to think as he thought and to see self and others through his eyes. So many people see being a Christian as merely "going to church" or as observing traditions and rituals. It's so much more and so different from such a worldly view.*

John 12:42-43 *Believing is not enough.*

1. Did the leaders come to believe in Jesus? *Yes.*
2. Why would they not admit their belief? *Fear and loving praise from men more than praise from God.*
3. How might this be the case in your life? *Often coming to a true and right belief in Jesus and acknowledging this either verbally or in our lives upsets others like parents, friends, governments, mentors, etc. God will not accept a "secretive" faith. Jesus says in Matthew 10:32-33 that if we're ashamed of him, he will be ashamed of us.*
4. Why would you love praise of men more than praise of God? *Because it's more immediately gratifying in either bringing short-term rewards or avoiding pain and rejection. God's praise is infinitely more rewarding, but it is often more long-term and frequently brings short-term suffering and pain. Short-term thinkers (faithless) simply want to go for the quick deal.*

The Cost of Being a Disciple

Romans 12:1-2 *Seeing God's mercy brings a complete self-sacrifice.*

1. What does viewing God's mercy through what he did on the cross do to your thinking? *It's completely humbling.*
2. How can you become a "living sacrifice"? *You give your whole life to His cause and purpose. (See also II Corinthians 5:15)*
3. There are two key facets of "worship" in the Bible. One is the inner awe and adoration of God expressed in total praise and thanksgiving. The other flows from adoration and is service. It means worshipping by serving. Paul says our self-sacrifice to God is spiritual worship. How is this so? *When we figure out the purpose and design of the world, then the things we do here are about our spiritual convictions, not fleshly pleasures.*
4. What does conforming to the pattern of the world look like? *It means to live by its purposes and subsequent behaviors.*
5. Why must the disciple not do so? *Because you cannot please God and the world. (See also Matthew 6:24; 1 John 2:15-17)*

John 8:31-32 *To be a true disciple of Jesus, we must know and obey his word.*

1. Is it possible to be considered a Christian and not be a disciple? *Yes. Most people don't even know the will of Christ.*
2. What does it mean to "hold to" Jesus' teaching? *Know it and obey it.*
3. What does Jesus imply by "really my disciples?" *Some "Christians"/believers aren't really disciples.*
4. How do you see yourself in this matter? *You can fool me, you can fool others, you can even fool yourself, but you can't fool God (2 Timothy 2:19).*

John 13:34-35 *True disciples will be recognized by their love for each other.*

1. **Matthew 22:39** - How is Jesus' new command different than the old one? *The old was referenced to self – to love others as I love myself. The new is referenced to Jesus – to love others as he loved us. His love is perfect and consistent; our love isn't.*
2. Why is this type of love a testimony to authentic discipleship? *Because this sort of love cannot be fabricated or faked. It comes only from Jesus and is completely unique in this world of facades.*

John 15:5-8 *If we're in Jesus, we will be fruitful in his service. This will demonstrate clearly our discipleship is authentic – from God.*

1. What does it mean to "remain in Jesus?" *To live in his will and way.*
2. What does it mean he "remains in me?" *When we're baptized into Christ, he pours his Spirit in us and comes to live in us.*
3. What sort of fruit is he speaking of? *Most likely, the fruit he's speaking of here is in our "friends" (v. 13). Jesus' fruit is saved sinners. When we follow him our fruit is being involved in saving sinners as well. His mission becomes our mission.*
4. Discuss how each of us can be involved in saving sinners without developing a guilt complex or a "messiah" complex (thinking we must be the Savior ourselves).

Matthew 28:18-20 *Jesus gave a self-perpetuating command for disciples to make and mature other disciples. This assures his presence in our lives and ministries.*

1. What does it mean that Jesus has "all authority?" *In all creation, he's in charge. Anything that is not conformed to his will is in rebellion to him.*
2. Why make disciples of all nations? *All should conform to his will since he's in charge.*
3. How do we make disciples? *By teaching them what we've been taught – God's got a plan, we've got a problem, and God's remedy is the gospel of Christ. All must accept him, obey him, and follow him.*
4. How does "obeying" Christ mature us? *His commands involve behaviors that cause us to become like him in our nature.*
5. What is the difference between teaching his commands and teaching others to obey his commands? *One is intellectual and the other is active and expressive.*
6. How is the command self-perpetuating? *He commanded it to the apostles and then told them to teach others to pass on what he'd commanded them. This is one of those commands. It summarizes the ultimate mission of Christ.*

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Homework

Reading the Word

1. **Luke 9:57-62** - To which character type do you most relate?
 - a. v. 57-58 - Quick to join, slow to realize the cost?
 - b. v. 59-60 - A person with “good” excuses?
 - c. v. 61-62 - A person with allegiances to others over Christ?
2. **Mark 1:16-18** - How does Jesus make us “fish for men?”

Challenging Yourself

Write down a schedule of where your time was spent this week, with either 15 or 30 minute intervals.

Are you living like Christ?

What are some practical steps you could take to make your life more like Christ’s?