What does it mean to be a Christian?

Christian Living · https://thebiblicalroots.org/answers/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-christian/

To be a Christian means to belong to Jesus Christ through faith in Him. A Christian is simply someone who trusts that Jesus is the Son of God who died for their sins and rose again, and who now follows Him as Lord (Rom. 10:9–10; 1 Cor. 15:1–4). So Christianity is not primarily about being moral, religious, politically conservative, or culturally "churchy." It is about being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

According to the New Testament, Christians are people who have been forgiven, adopted into God's family, and made new through union with Christ (John 1:12; 2 Cor. 5:17). Christians are not saved by good works or religious performance but by God's grace through faith in Jesus (Eph. 2:8–9).

The word "Christian" first appears in the book of Acts:

> "And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians." (Acts 11:26)

The term literally means "belonging to Christ" or "followers of Christ." Initially, it may even have been used mockingly by outsiders. But believers embraced the identity because their lives were centered on Jesus.

At its core, Christianity is built on the Gospel—the good news that sinful humanity can be reconciled to a holy God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Scripture teaches that all people are sinners by nature and by choice (Rom. 3:23). Sin separates us from God and brings judgment and death (Rom. 6:23). But God, in His love and mercy, sent His Son into the world to save sinners (John 3:16–17).

Jesus lived the perfectly righteous life we could never live, died on the cross for our sins, and physically rose from the dead (1 Pet. 2:24; Luke 24:1–7). Through faith in Him, believers are forgiven, justified, and given eternal life (Eph 2:8–10).

This means becoming a Christian is not fundamentally about joining an institution or adopting a moral code. It involves repentance and faith. In the New Testament, repentance means turning away from sin and self-rule and turning toward God (Acts 3:19). Faith means trusting in Jesus—not

merely believing He existed, but entrusting yourself to Him as Savior and Lord.

This also means Christianity is more than intellectual agreement with facts. Even demons know certain truths about God (James 2:19). Biblical faith involves trust, allegiance, and transformed identity. Christians are united to Christ spiritually and become part of His body, the Church (1 Cor. 12:12–13).

The New Testament describes this transformation using several images:

- being “born again” (John 3:3–8)
- becoming a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17)
- being adopted as sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8:15–17)
- passing from death to life (John 5:24)

Importantly, Christians are not people who have become sinless. Believers still struggle against sin in this life (Rom. 7:15–25). The difference is that Christians now belong to Christ and are being progressively transformed by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16–25).

Historically, mainstream Christianity across Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions has agreed on the central essentials of what it means to be a Christian: belief in the Triune God, the deity and resurrection of Jesus Christ, salvation by God’s grace, and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. Christians may disagree on secondary issues such as church structure, baptism, spiritual gifts, or end-times views, but these core truths define historic Christian faith.

One final point is important in our cultural moment: Christianity is not inherited genetically or culturally. No one becomes a Christian merely by being born into a Christian family, attending church, living in America, or trying to be a good person. Jesus said, “You must be born again” (John 3:7). Every Christian must personally trust in Christ.

Key Scriptures to Study

- John 3:1–18 — Jesus explains the necessity of being born again.
- Romans 3:21–26 — Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Romans 10:9–10 — Christians confess Jesus as Lord and believe in His resurrection.
- Ephesians 2:8–10 — Salvation is by grace through faith, not works.
- 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 — The core content of the Gospel.
- John 1:12–13 — Believers become children of God.

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 — Christians are new creations in Christ.
- Galatians 2:20 — The Christian life is lived through union with Christ.

Objections & Misconceptions

Common Objection: “Is being a Christian just about being a good person?”

No. Christianity certainly includes moral transformation, but morality itself does not save anyone. Scripture teaches salvation comes through faith in Christ, not human goodness (Eph. 2:8–9).

Common Objection: “Aren’t all religions basically teaching the same thing?”

No. Christianity is unique in teaching that salvation is a gift of grace accomplished by God Himself through Jesus Christ. Most religions fundamentally center on what humans must do to reach God. Christianity centers on what God has done for us in Christ.

Common Objection: “Can someone call themselves a Christian and still live in ongoing sin?”

Christians still struggle with sin, but genuine faith produces repentance and spiritual transformation over time (1 John 3:6–10). A person cannot persistently reject Christ’s lordship while claiming allegiance to Him.

Why This Matters

The question “What does it mean to be a Christian?” is ultimately a question about salvation, identity, and eternity. Scripture teaches that eternal life is found in Jesus Christ alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

This doctrine also protects us from reducing Christianity to politics, morality, self-improvement, or religious ritual. At the center of Christianity is not a philosophy but a Person: Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

And because salvation is grounded in Christ’s finished work rather than our own performance, Christians can have real assurance, peace, and hope before God (Rom. 5:1–2).

Recommended Resources

- Mere Christianity — by C. S. Lewis. Classic introduction to the core beliefs of Christianity.
- Basic Christianity — by John Stott. Clear and concise presentation of the Christian faith.

- The Reason for God — by Timothy Keller. Thoughtful apologetic for Christianity in the modern world.