

labels.

we all use them. pigeonholing. we've all done it.

labeling or pigeonholing gives us a false sense of security. once we've labeled or classified someone or something, we feel more comfortable and more "in control" of it. we've all heard the saying. "if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck.

but have you ever wondered if we can safely apply this principle to Christianity? if one wears a Christian label and is kind and good and sincere in his beliefs, does that automatically make him or her a Christian?

before we can become anything in life, whether it be a doctor, lawyer, plumber, or factory worker. we must know what it is and what we must do to qualify to become one. in like manner, before we can become a Christian, we must know what a true Christian is and how to become one.

what does Jesus Christ think of the spectacle of thousands of different, competing denominations and sects each calling itself 'Christian' and yet differing and bickering over nearly every doctrine and tenet imaginable? is god divided? is god the author of confusion (1 corinthians 14:23)?

did christ teach several thousand different methods of salvation and ways of life or just one? in (john 10:1-4) Jesus pointed out that he is the good shepherd and that any who would enter the kingdom of God by any other means than the way he prescribed were thieves and robbers. he pointed out that many "shepherds" of gods flock are but hirelings, following the almighty dollar and the path of the least resistance. to cut through some of the confusion shrouding men's minds about real Christianity lets us first establish what a true Christian is.

an idle Christian is a raw material of which backsliders are made. in a real sense, Christianity is a test of endurance. christ said that he who endures to the end shall be saved (Matthew 24:13), not those who start out like a house afire and later "burn out." since we are left in a quandary upon seeing all the contention, backbiting, and disagreement of these hundreds of groups claiming to be Christian churches, we need to go to the very source they claim as their source the holy bible. the bible is the constitution and the bill of rights for the Christian.

what, then, is the bible definition (not webster's) of a Christian? read and memorize Romans 8:9: "now if any man has not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." there it is as plain as can be! therefrom your own bible is God's definition of a Christian! if one does not have, possess, and follow the holy spirit of God, he is not a bible defined Christian no matter what he says, how he acts, or what he teaches.

the holy spirit is the essence, power, mind, and spiritual extension of God.

God begets Christians as his sons and daughters through his spirit. it strengthens and fortifies a Christian spiritually, converts his mind, leads and guides him as necessary, and serves as an earnest or guarantee of eternal life (Ephesians 1:13-14).

now that we know the bible definition of a Christian, we must go on to ask, "and we are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the holy spirit, which God hath given to them that OBEY him," now, isn't the plain? it cuts right through so much human reasoning and situation ethics! disobedience is not an option. we find no category of "converted lawbreakers" anywhere in the bible. christ said, " why to call ye my lord, lord, and do not the things which I say?" (luke 6:46).

and yet sin is mankind's number one problem today. if you say sin is not a problem, you're missing the whole point. what is sin? once again, the bible is crystal clear sin as to what sin is: " sin is" here's the Bible's definition " the transgression {breaking} of the law" (1 john 3:4). the "wages" of sin what you "earn" by sinning is "death." death for all eternity, not " eternal life" in a different location. "but the gift of God," by contrast, " is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

here are a few verses in your bible that talks about repentance:

- Matthew 3:2 "and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

sidenote Matthew 3:2 the kingdom of heaven began when god himself entered human history as a man. today Jesus Christ reigns in the hearts of believers, but the kingdom of heaven is not fully realized until all evil in the world is judged and removed. christ came to earth first as a suffering servant; he will come again as king and judge to rule victoriously over all the earth.

- Matthew 3:8 "bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance."

sidenote Matthew 3:8 john the baptist called people to more than words or ritual; he told them to change their behavior. "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" means that God looks beyond our words and religious activities to see if our conduct backs up what we say, and he judges our words by actions that accompany them. do your actions match your words?

- acts 3:19 "repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the lord."

sidenote acts 3:9 john the baptist had prepared the way for Jesus by preaching repentance. the apostles' message of salvation also included the call to repentance acknowledging personal sin and turning away from it. many people want the benefits of being identified with Christ without admitting their own disobedience and turning from sin. the key to forgiveness is to confessing your sin and turning from it (2:38)

- acts 17:30 "and the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."

sidenote acts 17:30 paul didn't leave his message unfinished. he confronted his listeners with Jesus' resurrection and its meaning to all people either blessing or punishment. the greeks had no concept of judgment. most of them preferred worshipping many gods instead of just one, and the concept of resurrection was unbelievable and offensive to them. Paul did not hold back the truth. however, no matter what they might think of it. Paul often changed his approach to fit his audience, but he never changed his basic message.

- acts 20:21 "testifying both to the jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

sidenote acts 20:21 the way of the believer is not an easy road; being a Christian does not solve or remove all problems. paul served humbly and "with tears," but he never quit, never gave up. the message of salvation was so important that he never missed an opportunity to share it. and although he preached his message in different ways to fit different audiences, the message remained the same turning away from sin and turning to Christ by faith. the Christian life will have its rough times, tears, and sorrows, as well as joys, but we should always be ready to tell others what good things God has done for us. his blessings far outweigh life's difficulties.

- acts 26:20 "but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the gentiles, that they should repent and turn to god, and do works meet for repentance."
- Matthew 4:17 "from that time Jesus began to preach and to say, " Repent: for the kingdom is at hand."

sidenotes Matthew 4:17

1. the " kingdom of heaven" has the same meaning as the "kingdom of God"

in mark and luke. Matthew uses this phrase because the jews, out of their intense reverence and respect, did not pronounce god's name. the kingdom of heaven is still near because it has arrived in our hearts. (see the notes on 3:2 for more on the kingdom of heaven.)

- luke 15:10 " likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Palestinian women received ten silver coins as a wedding gift. besides their monetary value, these coins held sentimental value like that of a wedding ring, and to lose one would be extremely distressing. just as a woman would rejoice at finding her lost coin, so angels would rejoice over a repentant sinner. each individual is precious to god. he grieves over every loss and rejoices whenever one of his children is found and brought into the kingdom. perhaps we would have more joy in our churches if we shared Jesus' love and concern for the lost, diligently seeking them, and rejoicing when they come to the savior.

lookup the verses in your bible and meditate upon them. you will find that true repentance consists of several things. there is a true sense of one's own guilt and sinfulness. then there is an appreciation of god's mercy in Christ. when you see yourself as God sees you, there comes an actual hatred of sin (psalm 119:128; job 46:5,6; 2 corinthians 7:10). and finally, there is a sincere turning from sin to god in the way of his commandments. a Christian is not perfect, just forgiven.

as we look and read in Hebrews 11:6, "but without faith, it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to go must believe that he is and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him," what is faith, but belief and conviction in something you can not see? faith is defined in the bible as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"

it is the daring of the soul to go further than it can see. there is no better demonstration of faith than a man planting seeds in a field. yet, like the farmer who plants no seed, when you cease to use and act upon your faith, you lose it.

we are cautioned in Hebrews 3:12, " take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God," for " no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (luke 9:26).

(in 2 corinthians 5:7) " for we walk by faith, not by sight."

in other words, we live our Christian life by faith in contrast to depending solely upon the temporal things of life.

" thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (psalm 119:105). this verse will encourage you to be guided in your Christian path

by the word of god. why? because it is the lamp and the light for our feet and the path in our life. without the word of god, we will walk aimlessly on the wicked path of life that the devil got us on.

we cannot accomplish this on our own strength, without god's help if you try to live the Christian life without being a Christian (that is, without the guiding power of god's holy spirit) you cannot last.

you will not be able to endure to the end (Matthew 4:13). confess your sins and ask god's forgiveness. be baptized and have hands laid upon you so that you may receive the holy spirit. we see these principles capsulated in (Hebrews 6:1-2), where they are defined as "the doctrine of Christ": "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."

let us now get down to specifics. as Christians, we have seen that we are to walk or go through life, in a certain way. in (Matthew 7:13-14), Jesus tells us that the correct path of life is narrow "enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

what then is this path? the scriptures teach us that the path to eternal life is through Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us in (john 14:6,) "I am the way, the truth, and life: no man cometh unto the father, but by me."

*the first fundamental of the Christian walk is proper to worship,
scriptures to read and study.*

- 1. exodus 34:14*
- 2. Isaiah 2:8*
- 3. read both Jeremiah 10:2 and Deuteronomy 12:30-32*
- 4. john 4:23*
- 5. 1 peter 4:11*
- 6. psalm 34:1; 119:164; 133:1*
- 7. Hebrews 4:9; 10:25*
- 8. proverbs 27:17*

the second component of the Christian walk is obedience.

- 1. James 2:20*

2. John 4:24

3. Matthew 7:16-20

the third essential of the Christian walk is the study of god's word.

1. 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:7; 3:16,17

2. Ephesians 5:8-10; 6:17

3. Hebrews 4:12

4. 1 Corinthians 6:2-3

5. 2 Peter 3:18

6. Ecclesiastes 4:12