

Are you a Christian if you go to a church besides the Church of Christ?

Question: I have heard that the Church of Christ does not believe you are a Christian if you attend church other than at a Church of Christ. Is this true?

Answer: We appreciate very much the question submitted by our reader. Too many times people hear things and just accept them as being true. The Bible tells us to prove all things and that is what this inquiry seeks to do.

The answer to the question is no, it is not true. Attending a worship service of a church be it denominational or the Lord's church does not make one a Christian nor does it make one who is a Christian not one. In addition, we might add that Christians can and often do sinful things. We have to realize that doing Christian things does not make one a Christian. For example we know that Christians are very benevolent in their nature. We seek to help those who are down-trodden and that are in need of help, but Christians are not the only benevolent people on the earth. We happen to know some who are very concerned about the plight of the poor and have given of their time and resources to help them, but they are unbelievers. That is they do not profess to be Christians. Just because they are benevolent does not make them a Christian. Again, doing Christian-like things does not make a one a Christian.

If we take the question above, flip it around and ask, "Does attending a Church of Christ make you a Christian?" the answer is obvious. Just because one goes to services of a Church of Christ does not constitute being born again.

"What is it that makes one a Christian?" is the more important question. As a society, we have grown very ignorant of what the Bible teaches on many subjects. Many are not able to answer the question posed above. In that which follows we will give a biblical answer to the question of what makes one a Christian.

The very term Christian is a word denoting those who belong to Christ. Therefore, the term applies to all that are His. But who are His?

Jesus speaking of Himself said *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:16). By this statement we find that Jesus is telling us that the line of distinction between those who are Christians and those who are not is what they choose to do with Him!

The reason Jesus came to the earth is because man is a sinner. The apostle Paul writing in Romans 3:10-18 states,

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one, There is none who understands, There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no not one. Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit; The poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are their ways; And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

In order for one to fully comprehend the need for obeying Jesus one must first understand their sin. Too often we hear people who want to emphasize the love and forgiveness that God has without bringing up man's sinfulness. The story of Calvary does not make sense unless it is presented against the backdrop of our sin. It is because of our sin that God's grace is demonstrated and offered through the redemptive work of Christ. Paul sums up the point he is making in Romans 3:23, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

The reason that we have taken the time to establish the sinfulness of man is to allow us to see the need for salvation. Until one comes to grip with the fact that one is a sinner there will be no need nor any profit in presenting Christ as a crucified and risen savior. But once this truth is accepted and clearly becomes a part of one's thinking then it is easily seen that salvation from sin is our greatest need. Paul defines this need in Romans 6:23, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

The fact that we are sinners defines for us the need to respond to God's invitation of salvation. It is not

possible for us to establish our own righteousness. Our righteousness is imputed. When we respond to Christ and accept Him as the way to salvation, His righteousness is counted for ours. The real need is to respond to Christ, but how?

It all begins with making a decision about Jesus. Is He who He says He is? Do we believe that He was God come in the flesh? Do we believe that His death was accepted by the Father as the payment for our sins? Do we believe that He died, and was buried, and was resurrected from the dead? Do we believe that He currently sits at the right hand of God making intercession for us? Do we believe that He is the great mediator between God and Man? If so then our belief must become faith!

Here is a point upon which many stumble. They feel that by merely believing the above about Christ that they have accepted Him as their savior. However, this is not the case. The Bible is explicit on teaching us that merely believing the truth about Jesus is not the same as walking by faith. Faith is a response. While it includes believing the truth of scripture it also contains an element called obedience. A response involves action on the part of the one who believes. Time and space does not allow a complete discussion of this distinction but we do want to refer our readers to a couple of passages of scripture. The first is found in James 2:19. James tells us the demons believe and tremble. Surely no one would say that the demons because they believe in God and Christ are saved! The other passage we refer to is Hebrews chapter 11. Read fully the comments concerning the faithful. Note that in each count that those who had faith did something. They responded obediently to the command of God. This is why Jesus said, *"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"* (Matthew 7:21).

What, then, is the response of those who believe in Christ? First, we see the need to repent. Jesus taught the necessity of repentance as did the apostles (Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:38, 3:19, 17:30). Repentance is to change one's mind for the better, by heartily amending ones past course with abhorrence for one's past sins. It is driven by a godly sorrow as contrasted with a worldly sorrow. The difference being that the former is due to hatred of sin and the latter is due to hatred of its consequences.

Second we have the need to confess. Again Jesus tells us that unless we confess Him before men He will not confess us before His Father (Matthew 10:32-33, Romans 10:9-10, I John 4:15). Confession is to acknowledge openly and joyfully. It involves agreement with the truth.

All of the above lead us to the acceptance of Christ. But they do not result in us becoming dead to sin. Death to sin implies two things. The term is used first in a legal sense. In the scripture it is called justification. It is also involved in progressive sanctification whereby we mortify sin in our life. The first occurs when we put Christ on in baptism and the latter is a lifelong process as we are conformed to the image of Jesus.

As indicated above the dividing line between those who are Christians and those who are not is baptism for the remission of sin. This was the response Peter gave to those who on the day of Pentecost when they ask what they should do about their sin. Peter told them, *"...Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38).

The apostle Paul in Romans 6 goes into great detail concerning the subject of baptism. This passage of scripture teaches us that:

1. We are baptized into the death of Christ. It is in baptism that we are immersed into His death (Romans 6:3).
2. Having died with Christ we are also buried with Him by baptism (Romans 6:4).
3. Having been buried with Him we are also raised in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:4-5).

Paul continues by instructing us that it is in the act of baptism that our old man is crucified with Him that the body of sin might be done away with (Romans 6:6). It is when we respond to Christ in this manner that we are added to the body of the saved, the Church.

We have explained this so that one might understand what it takes to be a Christian. Therefore the original question suggested that it is where one attends church is the deciding fact. This is not what puts one in Christ. Paul

wrote, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

We do want to conclude that Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 28:18-20, after being baptized, that they were to be taught to observe all things that He had commanded. Therefore, once one has become a Christian, they must select a congregation that adheres to doing things that God has decreed.

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