

What is a Christian?

By

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A Christian is a follower of Christ. To lead a Christian life means to put into practice and apply to one's conduct the teachings of Christ. These teachings are truths to be believed and a code of behavior that depends upon or is precipitated from those truths. Christ taught that all who believe in Him are to consider God as their Father, and thusly children of God through the Christ Jesus; in other words, brothers and sisters to one another. Then again, those who do not believe in the Christ, Jesus tells us have Satan as a father. And that is because, as Jesus said, they don't believe the truth; and He is the Truth! The Scriptures say that if Christ is not within you, you are none of His! With this in front of us, what should we say?

The question that needs answering is, "What is a Christian?" Many have attempted to answer this question by presenting a creed to be believed, but, when really boiled down, only causes more question to be asked. The assertion of saying one is a Christian and the actions portraying one a Christian are two different things. Anyone can claim to be a Christian, but if ones life does not show it, the assertion is, to be blunt, a lie. Then, one can be a Christian who is like a babe who needs to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus"—this we must distinguish.

A great leader of the church who lived a little over a hundred years ago wrote much on Christianity. A lady, in reading his published articles, wrote to him inquiring whether he thought those un-immersed were Christians, and he replied in part: "Who is a Christian? I answer, everyone who believes in his heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God; repents (changes his mind) of his sins, and obeys Him in all things according to his measure of knowledge of His Will. A perfect man in Christ, or a perfect Christian, is one thing; and 'a babe in Christ,' is another. The New Testament recognizes both the perfect man and the imperfect man in Christ." This teacher then went on to say: "I cannot ... make any one duty the standard of Christian state or character, not even immersion into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and in my heart regard all that have been sprinkled in infancy without their own knowledge and consent, as aliens from Christ and the well-grounded hope of heaven."

This teacher's partially quoted answer reveals that he did not believe in so-called "infant baptism(?)" as valid for Christians. To him, just as Scriptures say, baptism is an immersion into the body of Christ, and when a person reaches the age of reason, and realizes that Christ was commanding immersion of a person who believes in Him, he is bound to be submissive to the one he claims to love. As Christ said: "If you love me, you will do as I command" (John 14:15). To this teacher, one is a Christian WHEN he "puts on Christ" as the apostle Paul said in Galatians 3:27-29. I wonder if this teacher read what Gennadius (508 AD, listed as a "saint" in the Roman Catholic Church), in his book, *De Eccl. Dogmatibus*, chapter 52, said: "It is not to be believed that those are baptized who have not been immersed!" One thing I am sure he must have read was a book written by Gregory the Great (Pope-Bishop of Rome, 590 AD), *Morialum*, chapter 27, who said: "Our very descent into the water is called baptisma, i.e., immersion." If the

early Bishops of the church of Rome insisted that one was NOT a Christian until one CONSENTED to be “immersed” in water, what is this teaching of infant baptism? Who started it? Why? Is infant sprinkling really baptism? What did the Christ Jesus mean when He said: “The one believing and then being baptized shall be saved”?

A couple of years ago a friend and I visited with the Adjunct Bishop of Archbishop Roach of the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis. The conversation was quite long, and the Bishop was a good listener to what we were saying. We were complaining of the teachings of his church. One of the things he told us was that “If a man cannot reconcile according to the Gospel, what is preached by the church, he should tell his convictions to the leader and responsibly work toward making a change of the church’s position.. This can be difficult, a process in which one has no complete assurance about how to proceed.”

In a letter I sent this Bishop shortly after our meeting, he responded by saying that “We thank you for your great concern for purity in Catholic doctrines. I believe that you are truly seeking to follow the path that leads to God. I respect your openness and your desire to be led the Holy Spirit. He is the real and true leader, and he will bring us to the Father.” In ending his letter, he stated: “Thank you very much for your concern and I pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide you as you are seeking to know His ways.” But this Bishop did not answer any of our questions, nor dispute what we brought to his attention. He just nodded his head and agreed that what we said was true. Absolutely no effort on his part was made to address the wrongs that were being preached and taught in his church.

Most of the priests and Bishops we talked to on this topic say that is one of the most basic teachings of the Holy Scriptures, and also one of the greatest stumbling blocks that divides one Christian from another—the teaching of infant baptism and what is a Christian. They also agreed that the average Catholic hasn’t the faintest idea of what Scriptures teach on this matter. But again, nothing is done to correct this deficiency.

In speaking with a Deacon belonging to a local Catholic church recently, he really surprised us by what he said concerning the topic of baptism. He said that the new Rite of the church allows a person to be immersed when he understands that it is the command of Christ. When we asked him what he thought about infants being candidates for baptism, he surprised us again. He said “That sprinkling is a command of the church and is in no way a command of Christ Jesus. A baby cannot possibly be an unbeliever or, for that matter, a believer. A baby cannot make a choice to either receive or reject Christ’s command to be immersed.. A baby cannot possibly repent or change its mind towards sin, nor can it acknowledge Jesus as Lord. As for sprinkling instead of immersion, well, that practice didn’t start until many centuries after Christ.”

Yes, baptism means an immersion in water. Besides, that practice only prevailed in some of the Western churches, and that not until the thirteenth century; the Eastern churches retained the original meaning of the word baptisma. When we asked the above mentioned Deacon what he would do about letting his fellow members know the truth, he replied that he would like to, but that it would stir up a hornet’s nest. He also added that “It’s too bad that the average person in the pew doesn’t seem to care enough to seek after knowledge of the Will of God by doing a little study of the facts.”

Jesus was himself baptized by immersion, and said that it was to fulfill all righteousness. Does it not speak to what we should also have done to fulfill

righteousness? Jesus said that if one loves him, they should obey him. Jesus commanded that all believers be immersed—can one be a Christian, one of His followers, and not obey his command? I have my doubts that one can.

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