

I am a Christian.

Perhaps You are Not.

So,

Is This a Big Deal?

To Start With

During a conversation with some religious leaders, Jesus Christ made a statement which helps us to understand what it means to be a Christian. He told a group of Jews the following:

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; JOHN 10:27

This helps explain what it means to be a Christian. Christians hear and follow the voice of Jesus Christ. The voice of Jesus is found in the pages of the Bible. All Christians hear the voice of Jesus. They do not hear a literal audible voice. Christians hear with "hearts' ears." But what do Christians hear? What do they follow? To answer these questions, let us eavesdrop on another conversation from Scripture. Jesus was going about preaching and teaching. He had come from Heaven to reveal the Gospel of His heavenly Father. On one such occasion, He was confronted about His teaching by religious leaders.

And it came about on one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple **and preaching the gospel**, that the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him, LUKE 20:1

Notice that Jesus was preaching the Gospel and that this Gospel would eventually bring scorn and hatred from the religious rulers. It did so, because the Gospel identified Jesus as the Son of God and because it boldly asserted that Jesus would accomplish the will of His Father to save ungodly sinners from an eternal Hell. It may be said that the voice of Jesus, which all Christians hear, is the voice of this Gospel. Christians hear the Gospel.

But what precisely is the Gospel?

The actual word "Gospel" literally means the announcement of Good News. From this same term comes the English words "evangelical" and "evangelize." The Gospel is the announcement of Good News that Jesus Christ has come to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. All who repent of their sinfulness and trust, by faith, the finished work of Christ, shall receive the gift of eternal salvation.

God justifies the ungodly because He is completely satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son.. To justify means to acquit. God justifies the ungodly in light of Jesus death on their behalf. Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Guilty sinners are acquitted because Jesus paid their penalty.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. JOHN 3:16

The Main Idea of the Gospel

The Gospel, the message of Good News, reveals much about God and His view of sin. God is completely angry with sin and is utterly intolerant of even the smallest of sin. Surprisingly, God did not reveal His revulsion to sin in the Old Testament as fully as He now has in the New Testament. The fact that God sent His Son to die for sin is the ultimate and supreme demonstration of His righteousness.

The fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, must die for sin reveals much about the character of God. God gave His Son out of love. But we must see that God's righteousness had to be satisfied. Only Jesus could satisfy the justice of God. Jesus was the perfect price demanded by the perfect Law of the perfect God. Jesus was the satisfaction for sin. The death of Jesus was so that God might be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Jesus took the penalty demanded by God's justice.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for us**. Much more then, having now been **justified by His blood**, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. ROM 5:8,9

This death for the ungodly is a testimony of God's demand that sin be punished. Christ's death was also a perfectly righteous sacrifice. As such, God forever views this single, solitary act as sufficiently righteous to satisfy His wrath against sin. He then accounts the righteousness of Jesus to the record of the ungodly. God has mercy on the ungodly. He gives to them the righteousness of Jesus. He does so because they have none of their own. They are lost in a world of iniquity. They would have no hope were it not for the righteousness of Christ given in love and received by faith alone.

"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered. "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account."
ROM 4:7,8

From the beginning to the end, it has been the design of God to give a full, immediate and permanent redemption. God has mercy on all those trusting [by faith alone] in the finished work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus paid it all. Truly, God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

So, What Am I?

I am a Christian. I really believe that God is offended by my sins. I really believe that I am

worthy of eternal punishment due to my sins. I also believe that Jesus Christ is the only suitable payment for my sins. I hear His voice. He says that I am a sinner worthy of eternal punishment. I hear His voice. He says that I do not have a righteousness of my own to satisfy His wrath against my sins. I hear His voice. He says that I must trust His atonement for my sins. He says that I must take His righteousness as my own by faith or I will be eternally damned. I am a Christian because I hear the voice of Jesus. He assures me of the Good News that He has paid the price due my sins. This is a price no one on earth, including me, could ever pay.

How Do Christians Hear the Voice of Christ?

No one really understands *how* some hear the voice of Christ and others do not. But it is an undeniable fact of life that some hear and others do not. The Bible is helpful along these lines. It sets forth the *being able to hear the voice of Jesus* as a miracle. Remember, His sheep *hear* His voice and they *follow* Him. The Bible describes this ability to hear as being born again. Literally, the Bible says one must be “born again” or “born from above.” If we eavesdrop on Jesus’ conversation with another Jewish leader in the New Testament, we hear His explanation of how someone is able to hear the voice of Jesus.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God." JOHN 3:3

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, '**You must be born again.**' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." JOHN 3:6,7,8

In reality, nobody can hear the voice of Jesus and believe the Gospel unless he is “born again” or “born from above.” How can one be born from above? This is the miracle of God. One cannot hear unless God gives him ears to hear. One cannot see unless God gives him eyes to see. One cannot follow unless God gives a heart of faith. This is perhaps why Jesus went on to say:

"My Father, **who has given them to Me**, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. JOHN 10:29

Earlier in the book of John, Jesus was even more assertive that only those who were given to Him by His heavenly Father would hear His voice:

And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, **that no one can come to Me**, unless it has been granted him from the Father." JOHN 6:65

This is a great mystery among Christians. We have been convicted by God of our terrible

sinfulness and our need of a savior. We have been touched in the deepest part of our souls to understand that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came to set His people free from sins. We have been convinced by God that faith alone, in the finished work of Christ alone, on that bloody cross at Calvary, gives us the free gift of eternal life. We have been persuaded that Christ has born our iniquities and we shall not suffer the punishment due our transgressions. We have been melted in our hearts and are now followers of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. He has called us with a sure calling. He has mysteriously changed our minds and we now serve Him.

A Simple Confession of Faith

I am a Christian. I trust Jesus Christ as my substitute and sin-bearer. I hear His voice and follow Him. As such, I join with countless others living today and those who have gone before in singing such hymns as:

“Years I spent in vanity and pride, knowing not my Lord was crucified, knowing not it was for me He died at Calvary.”

I also testify to the life-changing effect that Jesus Christ has on those who flee to Him for forgiveness of their sins:

Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

Perhaps You Are Not a Christian

If you are not a Christian, it is because you cannot hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not good news to you because you hear a different voice. There may be thousands of different voices in your head at any given moment. There is the voice of philosophy, the voice of religion, the voice of morality and the voice of ethics. These voices guide and direct you. The Scriptures are not very sympathetic to the mind-set and world view of the non-Christian. The non-Christian suppresses the truth about such things as sin, hell, eternity and Jesus Christ. He cannot bear to think of such matters. They make him nervous and he must tune out such thoughts. The mind of the non-Christian is set on the here and now. Let us listen to the Word of God as written by the apostle Paul. Notice the focus on the mind-set.

Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of **the mind**, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. EPHESIANS 2:3

This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, **in the futility of their mind**, EPHESIANS 4:17

Can This Be Good News?

The Gospel is the announcement of Good News! However, ironically, it is only Good News to those who are convinced that they are under the wrath of God. The Gospel is only Good News if you are persuaded that you are a sinner in the hands of an angry God. The Gospel is only Good News if you are stricken, smitten and afflicted by your own utter sinfulness. If you do not believe that there is a God, the Gospel is not Good News. If you think the God of the Bible is nothing more than Christian imagination, the Gospel is not Good News. If you have been influenced to believe that God loves you and would not send you to Hell, then the Gospel is not Good News. The Gospel is cherished by those who find themselves to be vile. To the rest, it is foolishness.

For the word of the cross is to **those who are perishing foolishness**, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through **the foolishness of the message** preached to save those who believe. 1 CORINTHIANS 1:21

No Middle Ground

One thing that really irks non-Christians is the intolerance of Christians toward any other point of view. Most folks like to “live and let live.” Most folks abide by the inflexible rule of tolerance. Tolerance is the breeding ground of a false hope among non-Christians. It is said, “Maybe there is more than one way to eternal bliss in the life hereafter.” It is thought, “Maybe there is no hereafter at all.” It has been said, “Maybe all religions have a grain of truth to them.” Furthermore, “Maybe each person will arrive at a good spot after death based upon the sincerity of his ideals and quality of his beliefs.” It is said, “Who knows?” Non-Christians love the middle ground. It gives them flexibility. It allows for their own point of view on things. It enables them to define things with their own terms and definitions. The natural bent of the non-Christian is to “fight for the middle ground.”

However, this is not the voice of Christ. Christians hear Him speak emphatically on the issue of middle ground in two assertive portions of the Bible. For those favoring the middle ground, this is not what they want to hear:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; **no one** comes to the Father, **but through Me.** JOHN 14:6

And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. "I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; **for unless you believe that I am He,** you shall die in your sins." JOHN 8:23,24

Jesus would be open to the charge of “intolerance”, “bigotry”, “dogmatism” and “prejudice.” He did not cut any slack to the opposing point of view. He was adamant that there was no other way to God than through confidence in His sacrificial death on the cross. He was equally unyielding that there was no God other than His heavenly Father. Perhaps this is why He says:

"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. MATTHEW 12:30

But, I Thought I Was a Christian!?

The book of Acts, in the New Testament, describes how, in the infant stages of the preaching of the Gospel, those who heard the voice of Jesus were called disciples of Christ. They were men and women and children who understood, believed and shared the Gospel throughout the eastern Mediterranean region. This included Israel and Syria. It was not until the teaching ministry of

Barnabas and Paul in Antioch that the early disciples were called Christians. Back then, to be a Christian meant that you heard the voice of Jesus in the Gospel and followed Him in faith. Today, the term “Christian” is claimed by countless millions. But are all those who claim the name really Christian? No. Sadly, the popular notion of what a Christian is and how one becomes a Christian has nothing to do with Christianity.

Remember, “My sheep *hear* My voice and they *follow* Me.” These words should always be kept in mind when trying to answer the question, “Am I a Christian?” Again, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” There are many ways to convince yourself that you are a Christian, when in reality you are not.

1. Christians are not born into Christianity. Regardless of the faith of your parents, until you are convinced of the Gospel yourself and hear the voice of Jesus, you are not a Christian.
2. Christians cannot be produced through religious rituals or practices. Sacraments, secret ceremonies, esoteric [obscure] inductions and religious exercises cannot produce a Christian.
3. Christians cannot be manufactured by the waters of baptism. Elaborate liturgical ceremonies may bring about devout reflections, but not Christianity.
4. Christians cannot be mass constructed through coercion [intimidation]. It is a tragic fact of history that so many have tried to legislate Christianity into society by mandating true faith.
5. Having faith in God is not Christianity. There are many “gods” of men’s imaginations. It is faith in the God of the Bible that counts. His revelation, through the words and work of Jesus Christ, constitutes the only object of faith that interests God.
6. Professing faith is not the same thing as *possessing* faith. Christians are not such by profession but by *possession* of faith. It is a faith that hears the Gospel, believes it and follows.

What About My Religion?

Webster defines religion as “a belief in a divine or superhuman power or powers to be obeyed and worshiped as the creator (s) and ruler (s) of the universe.” There is a world of difference between Christianity and religion. The Bible defines Christianity as the revelation of God in the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ.

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; **listen to Him!**" MATTHEW 17:5.

While there are many religions, there is only one true God and He has revealed Himself in His Son. This is the faith of the Christian.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, **in these last days has spoken to us in His Son**, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

HEBREWS 1:1,2

Contrary to public sentiment [and hope], not all roads lead to Heaven. There is only one way and that is faith in the Gospel of Christ alone. Religion, no matter how sincerely believed, is wrong. It will avail a person nothing when he dies.

The Authority Of Our lives

I have stated that all Christians hear the voice of Jesus Christ. They do so because they have been born again and have ears to hear and eyes to see. But this hearing of Jesus finds its focus in the Bible. All Christians are people of the Bible. But not all people of the Bible are Christians. There are many cults which use the Bible to proof-text their religious ideas. There are many non-Christian religions which affirm the Bible but cannot affirm the Gospel or the Christ of the Bible. Essentially, all Christians place the Bible at the center of their lives as the authority in their lives. Non-Christians cannot do this.

Superficial

As we come near to the end of this booklet, understand that it is possible to have an intellectual understanding of the Gospel without a changed heart. This would be the case of those who affirm the historical reality of the Gospel but are not born again. They take on board the Bible as intellectual truth but have not been convicted of their sinful state and have not really heard the voice of Jesus. They are not His sheep. These folks have intellectual interest but no trust. They will not deny the facts, but they will not trust the Gospel. They have no heart for the Gospel. They do not follow the Lord.

Works, Works and More Works!

In contrast to the class of people above, there are others who do strive to follow the teaching of Jesus. They always seem to be consciously worried about what Jesus may think of them. But these folks have never been enabled to believe that Jesus satisfied the wrath of His Father against the sins of His people once and for all at the cross. Such folk are involved in doing their share in hopes of obtaining their own salvation. Some folk do not even like the idea of an eternal

redemption based only upon the work of Christ. Hence, they practice ritualistic religions and strive to live rightly, but believe wrongly. In the final analysis, they have confidence in their “right living.” These folks also have a superficial relationship with the Bible and cannot hear the Gospel. They consider themselves not bad enough to go to Hell and not good enough to go to Heaven. The apostle Paul ran into this world view. He mentions his difficulty with the rightly living/wrongly believing group in Romans the 10th Chapter:

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. ROMANS 10:1,2

Perhaps you are in a religious organization. Perhaps you have catalogued the commands of Jesus as found in the New Testament. Perhaps you have highlighted the ones you can obey with some degree of regularity. Perhaps your assessment of how well you obey certain commands of Jesus has given you a false security. You may be doing your best to live up to rules and regulations so that you may gain heaven. But, this is not the heart's belief of the sheep of Christ. The sheep of Christ follow Him from a changed heart of love and gratitude. They simply will not accept a new law built by men. Christ's sheep have come to understand the ruthlessness of the Law of God which can only condemn. They have sought shelter in the righteousness of another. They have heard the Savior say:

...nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and **not by the works of the Law**; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. GALATIANS 2:16

For the wages of sin is death, **but the free gift of God is eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord. ROMANS 6:23

For we maintain that a man is justified **by faith apart from works** of the Law. ROMANS 3:28

Head and Heart

Let us go back to our starting point in John 10. Jesus, in talking with people of His day, gave to us an amazing assertion:

"But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. JOHN 10:26

This does not sound right. We find ourselves wanting to correct the statement. We want Jesus to say, “but you are not my sheep, *because* you do not believe.” And yet, it is just the opposite.

He says they do not believe because they are not His sheep. If they were His sheep, they would believe. The sheep *really* believe. Those who are not His sheep *really* do not believe. Unless you are a sheep of Christ, you cannot believe. If you are a sheep, you will believe. The sheep of Jesus Christ believe with both their heart and mind. Those with a believing heart and mind understand the Gospel of Jesus. Anything added or subtracted from His Gospel betrays that belief as being spurious.

For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? **But we have the mind of Christ.** 1 CORINTHIANS 2:16

for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. ROMANS 10:10

There are those who have a head knowledge of Jesus but have no will to follow His teaching. They are not His sheep. There are those who have a religious knowledge of Jesus and love their religion. They are not His sheep. It must be both the head and heart, not one or the other.

Where Do You Stand?

Do you believe that you are a wicked sinner who has offended God with your sins?

Do you believe that you are deserving of Hell?

Do you have the conviction that the wrath of God abides upon you because of your disobedience to believe His Gospel?

Have you come to realize that your own righteousness is as filthy rags to the holiness of God?

Are you under persuasion to repent of your sins and trust the finished work of Christ alone for your salvation and deliverance from sin?

Have you clothed yourself with His righteousness by faith in His finished work?

Jesus Christ said, "come to me all you who are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." He had in mind heavy-laden with sin and worry. Will you come?

Jesus Christ said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies," Will you go to heaven when you die?

The Gospel of Christ brings man to the dust from which he was made. It convicts him of sin and announces the Good News that Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost.

Are you lost enough to need a savior? Are you lost at all?

His sheep hear His voice and they follow Him.

Do you hear His voice?

One Last Thought: Are You So Vile?

It is thought that man is generally pretty good. Indeed, there are many who are, in our eyes, nice people. There are philanthropists, social workers and peace corps volunteers. There are people who would not dream of hurting others. They give their time and energy to benevolent projects. There are many who appear to be kind and generous and good. But goodness is a relative term. With what standard shall we measure a man? If we determine the goodness of anyone by only a comparison with others, we have used the wrong measure. The fact is that Jesus Christ asked us to measure our goodness in comparison with perfection. If the best person in the world committed only one sin a day he would be guilty of over 20,000 sins in a normal life span. The Bible teaches that only one sin is enough to send anyone to Hell. The brutal fact is that man is intensively and extensively wicked and sin-laden. There are no exceptions. The Apostle Paul explains in Romans 3:10,11,12.

As it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one."

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ROMANS 3:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. ROMANS 6:23

So, What Is the Big Deal?

The bottom line is that Christianity is a bottom line proposition. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is stated in no uncertain terms. All those who deny the necessity of being clothed in the righteousness of Christ shall go to Hell covered in their sins. Those who fail to worship God through Jesus Christ are damned eternally. There is no other religious statement as stark and frightful as this. If you are not a believer then you are not a sheep. I urge you to repent of your sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. A neglect of this injunction will only confirm your rebellion and authenticate the hardness of your heart. Christians are ambassadors for Christ. As such they are messengers of the Gospel. The Gospel message is the announcement of Good News and the corresponding command to come to Christ. Throw down your arms of

insurrection which guard a cold heart of sin. Stop what you are doing and flee for refuge to Christ. Take Him as your savior. See Him as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world and Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Hear His voice!

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? HEBREWS 10:28,29

Please call me if I can help clarify the message of eternal life and forgiveness of sin in Christ- which is His Gospel:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TELEPHONE _____

The Good Shepherd comes to the doorkeeper. He is there to call His sheep!

"To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. "When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. "And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. John 10:3-6.

Do you understand?

