

Do you really want to be a “Christian”?

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Summary: With everything good and bad that can be said about organized Christianity – do you want to be called a “Christian”? Several have said they prefer other labels so that they’re not lumped in with Christians who don’t keep the sabbath or who keep pagan holidays, etc., not to mention the sometimes violent and sordid historical record of traditional Christianity. So in this teaching we examine both sides of this discussion. What did the early followers of Christ call themselves? What did Paul and Peter have to say about being called a “Christian”? And what IS a true Christian or true follower of Christ? Wherever you are on this subject, I hope you will hear and study this message. It will make you think.

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WELCOME once again, all you children of God Most High and believers in the risen Son of God, Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ). I appreciate those of you who visit our website, hear our sermons with the notes, and read the dozens of blogs we have. Be sure to check out the blogs too.

OPENING PRAYER...

Are you a “CHRISTIAN”? Or are you among a number who say they are “believers” in Christ, but who *really don’t* want to identify themselves with mainstream Christianity – who may be “Christian” in name but who don’t live and believe according to the Bible’s instructions. Some might call them a **CINO – Christian In Name Only**. Let me explain. And then let’s figure out if we should call ourselves, or if it’s OK to be a “Christian” or not.

I believe this can be quite an important thought and question to ponder. Ultimately of course it is your decision if you wish to be considered a Christian or not. But the ramifications may be more intense than you might have realized – with either way you go.

So we have some who call themselves by other names -- Messianic, or Hebrew Roots, or Believers -- or use other names and titles. *And even I am being urged by several to quit talking about “Christianity” and being a “Christian” and to say something else.* Maybe you have quit saying you’re a Christian. So this is why I’m talking about this. It’s important we understand this. I hope this teaching makes you really think – no matter which side you’re on with this topic. I’d love your feedback.

The reasoning basically for not wanting to be called a “Christian” is because the typical Christian believes in, and participates in, things some of us don’t.

- Like -- keeping the pagan-originated holidays like Christmas and Easter and Sunday as the day of worship instead of the Bible’s teaching of the 7th day Sabbath. Pastor

Pat Robertson, by the way, recently acknowledged the pagan origins of Christmas. Just click on this video:

<https://www.facebook.com/New2Torah/videos/1076355445716323/?theater>

- Many *other* “Christian” doctrines and beliefs are also so different than what so many sabbath keepers believe. So the thinking goes: “How can we say we are “Christian” when we don’t think and believe as so many of them do?”
 - And here’s a thought: some of those mainstream Christians might reject YOU as a true Christian because you don’t believe as they do! They might-- and often do – refer to some of you as cultists or heretics.
- Some would not want to be thought of as being Protestant or Catholic or even Greek Orthodox Christian. Besides that, it was established Christianity (Catholics mostly) who were the main persecutors of sabbath-keeping Christians or others who did not believe as they did. Many true believers were driven out of town, or burned at the stake, tortured and killed ... by, organized Christianity. Do you remember the Inquisition? The horrors of the Crusades –not just against Muslims, but also against Jews and Christians who believed differently from the crusading armies.
- Plus, let me bring this up: Did Peter or Paul ever act like, talk like, dress like – modern cardinals, bishops and popes? You know the answer, don’t you? No, they walked everywhere. They dressed like everyone else dressed – no special robes or garb. They didn’t live in palaces. I guarantee you, when you read of their worship services, they were very, very different from services in most Catholic and Protestant churches today.

They preached in the common-man’s language. They met in people’s homes – *not* in huge basilicas that in some cases were previously ancient pagan temples – like the Pantheon - a pagan temple, and today a major Catholic basilica; or like the site of St Peter’s in Rome on an ancient pagan burial ground called the Vatican.

So would Peter and Paul even RECOGNIZE many Christian services today as being anything resembling what they knew? *Let’s be clear: the early believers in Christ were nothing like the present-day established Catholics or even protestants in what they taught, believed, dressed like, or what they practiced!* Nothing like it. So with that in mind, I certainly can understand a reluctance by some sabbath-keeping believers to identify with mainstream Christianity. But keep listening... there’s more to this story for both sides to hear.

- Sabbath -keeping believers wonder how can they be a Christian when so many mainline Christians believe God threw away all his *own* laws and his own 10 commandments and that keeping the 10 commandments is no longer required. (I believe they really mean the 7th day sabbath command was thrown out, because I’d have a hard time believing they really believe I could live a life of debauchery, adultery, stealing, lying and cursing God’s name – and still be in the Kingdom of God! **See Galatians 5:19-21 if you have any doubt.** More later.)

- Most nominal “Christians” hardly even read the *Old* Testament or “Hebrew Scriptures” – even though those were the *only* Scriptures that were even *available* to the early believers for 30-50 years+ after the resurrection of Christ.

You catch the drift? But even then, even if your beliefs are so different from the mainstream Christians—*should* you *distance* yourself from being identified as a “Christian”? What is your alternative? And what impressions would you leave if you say you are not a “Christian”? And is it possible we can be kinder, realizing we too have fallen short of perfect, right behavior and doctrine many times in our past?

If a terrorist asks you someday if you’re a Christian – and he’s shooting Christians who confess their belief in Jesus Christ – what are you going to say and do? Pause for a second, and give yourself and me a truthful answer on this question.

But even today “Christian” is such a broad description. Do you mean sabbath-keeping, or do you mean Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Protestant – and which Protestant, or are you one of the smaller fringe groups like Jehovah’s Witness? Are all of these truly Christian?

I think a huge part of the problem is confusing “religion” with “Christianity”. Within the umbrella word “Christian” are thousands of denominations. Protestants are not Catholic, and vice versa. Sabbath keepers are not Protestant or Catholic.

So what is a Christian in its simplest form? And what were the earliest followers of Christ called? And perhaps more importantly, what did they call *themselves*? And what did their leaders have to say about being called a “Christian”?

What were the early Followers of Christ called?

The term “Christian” apparently started as an insult by non-believers to refer to people who followed Christ: “*those folks over there who follow that man they call the Christ. They’re Christians!*” It went something like that. Maybe it could be similar to the old days when we called followers of Mohammed – Mohammedans. Do you remember that? But being called a Christian – when it first started – was not intended by the ones using that term to be complimentary. They meant it as a slur, an insult.

But early believers were fine with the name as I will show later. To them it was an honor to be called a follower of Christ – the Anointed one. (Christ and Messiah both mean “anointed one”. One is Greek, one is Hebrew.)

Acts 11:25-26

“Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. **And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.**”

Presumably these disciples of Christ were obviously acknowledging Yeshua as their leader, and they were teaching what he taught and living as he lived. So they were obviously – by their words and their lives -- followers of Christ. But internally, the earliest followers of Christ referred to *themselves* by other names in the beginning.

The earliest followers of Christ called themselves by 5-6 main names. One was “disciples”. But once you get out of the book of Acts, you won’t find the word “disciples” being used. (See Acts 6:2, 7; 9: 1, 10, 19, 26, 36; Acts 13:52; Acts 16:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:16.) We think of the word ‘disciples’ as referring to the immediate 12 disciples who became apostles, but the word “disciple” was applied to any follower of Christ in the first 10-20 years especially. But not after the book of Acts.

“Believer”: Acts 5:14 – ‘and BELIEVERS were increasingly added...’

1 Timothy 4:2 – “be an example to the BELIEVERS...”

1 Timothy 6:2 -- “...who are benefited are BELIEVERS and beloved.”

2 Cor. 6:15 “...what part has a BELIEVER with an unbeliever?”

Among themselves, the early followers of Christ referred to each other most often by the name – do you know? – by the word “brethren”, i.e., brothers and sisters. The word “Brethren” can be found almost 200 times in the New Testament. (Matthew 23:8 – you’re all brethren; Luke 22:32 – “...strengthen the brethren.” Then Peter, Paul and so many others use it – Acts 6:3; 7:2; Romans 7:1, 4; 8:12; etc. etc.)

And of course, Paul also referred to the believers in Christ as – **SAINTS**! Holy ones. Set-apart ones. See my blog (Dec 2015) titled, “Do you want to be a Saint?”

Another commonly used word was “**Church of God**”, from “*ekklesia*” – assembly – of God”. Some people object to using the word “church” because of pagan roots to the word – from Circ or Kirk -- circle. Some churches in England and even the USA are called by names with Kirk in it – like Kirkstall Abbey in Yorkshire, England. And the original Greek word “ekklesia” does refer more to a group or assembly. So we could just as easily say “Assembly of God”, “Group of God” as “Church of God”.

So inside the body of Christ, they called each other – “brethren, saints, believers, or even disciples, members of the body of Christ, church of God.” *We do not find themselves referring to themselves – note that distinction – initially as “Christians”. But people outside the ekklesia – outside the body of Christ – were calling his followers Christians!*

Now let’s look at two other scriptures where the word “Christians” is used – and see for **ourselves how Paul and Peter took the word “Christian” as an HONOR.** Do the verses I’m about to read sound like they were against being tied to the name “Christian”?

Acts 26:25-29

“But he [Paul] said, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.”

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, “**You almost persuade me to become a Christian.**”

29 And Paul said, “**I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am [context: A Christian], except for these chains.**”

We don’t see Paul distancing himself from “Christian” here – but embracing it. *And certainly even by this time, there were already a growing number of FALSE believers.* In this next one in 1st Peter 4, let’s notice that the context is suffering for being associated with the name of Christ! Then Peter mentions what he means by that – and uses the term “Christian”.

1 Peter 4:12-16

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you **partake of Christ's sufferings**, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

14 **If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you**, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

16 **Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed**, but let him GLORIFY GOD in THIS matter.”

What matter? For suffering associated with being called a Christian! Peter says if you are insulted for the name of Christ –and he clearly identifies that as “Christian -- ‘BLESSED are you!’” (v. 14). Even when they use profanity and foul words associated with the name of Yeshua or Christ – “on your part He is glorified.”

Most translations are even clearer on verse 16. Here’s Holman Apologetics Study Bible:

1 Peter 4:16

“But if anyone suffers as a **Christian**, he should not be ashamed, **but should glorify God with that name**.”

Got that? With that name. In this matter. Either way, it should be very clear that Peter is saying – be honored to be a Christian if you have to suffer for that name. Please understand: in the coming terror especially from Muslims and later others – you could be beheaded for having the testimony of Christ or being called a Christian. Peter says – glorify God with that name if you suffer for being a Christian.

Would it be right to deny being a follower of Christ – i.e., a Christian as everyone else sees it – just because we want to technically tell everyone that we’re not mainstream Christians, we’re not Catholic or Protestant.

And you and I are not better than Paul or Peter. What I’ve read is straight from the Bible.

WHY SOME DON’T LIKE being called a “Christian”.

So based on what Paul and now Peter have said, why would anyone—or I -- want to distance myself from the name or term associated with Christ? Peter says it’s a blessing, we should not be ashamed of it, but we should glorify God in that name.

The argument I usually hear is a list like I gave at the start.

- **“But “Christians” don’t represent what I believe and practice.”**

Let’s be frank. Do you think all the Christians in Paul’s day believed, taught and acted like true Christians should have? Don’t you think many were bringing disrepute to that name? It’s very clear in Paul’s writings, as well as in Peter’s, in Jude’s, in James’ writings – that there were major doctrinal disputes going on within the church. There were people practicing very vile things – and associating with the church, calling themselves Christian, whom Jude calls “spots on your love feasts” (Jude 4, 12), godless men who had crept in unnoticed. It was already happening in a big way by the time Jude and James and 1-2-3 John were written. Paul speaks of “false brethren” seeking to bring converts back to bondage (Galatians 2:4). But notice how Paul deals with the issue of false preachers who were preaching Christ:

Philippians 1:15-18

*“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter [preach Christ] out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. 18 What then? Only that in every way, **whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.**”*

So this was already going on: false believers in the midst of the *ekklesia*.

And for that matter: have you – or have I – always practiced the life of a Christian perfectly? Of course not. We’re all flawed. We all have issues. We all have stumbled and rolled in the mire. I have. You have. So are you no longer a Christian? But this is why Paul says don’t mix belief in the true God with worship of demons. And why Peter says don’t get in trouble for being a murderer, thief or evil doer. Because some were!!

Are you seeing this now? Perhaps we can start to see that we need more kindness and humility on this matter of being a “Christian” – and of course I mean a TRUE Christian.

And doctrinally – the books of Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, Colossians, and Ephesians – all deal with doctrinal issues and even heresies that were coming up. But Paul still addressed all those believers in those cities as – SAINTS – in spite of their sins, infighting, divisions and doctrinal issues they were having. See the first few verses of the books of Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, etc.

SO WHAT LABEL DO YOU PREFER?

If you use the same standard on any other label you prefer to Christian ... you will eventually have to come to the same result: “they don’t represent me and my beliefs very well”. Why? Because people (including me) are flawed.

So what label would you prefer to use for true followers of Yeshua the Messiah – or Jesus the Christ?

Sabbath keeper? But some of them keep Christmas. Others will criticize you for cooking on the sabbath or going out to eat on the sabbath. Or vice versa. So does this label represent you better than “Christian”?

Believer? Many protestants and Catholics call themselves “believers” also – and they eat pork, worship on Sunday and keep the pagan holidays. So that won’t work any better by your standard.

Church of God (COG)? Many Pentecostal groups go by that label. Plus many sabbath-keeping COGs are fighting one another and splintering into hundreds of groups. Hmm....

Hebrew Roots? Messianic? Where are those names found in the scripture? And sooner or later you’ll find all kinds of things that you can’t subscribe to. Some of them have gone straight back into Judaism, except they accept Yeshua as the Messiah. But Judaism with all its traditions, prayer books (Siddur), shawls and head coverings – is NOT and never was, the religion of the Bible. Yeshua clashed with the Pharisees – the ancestors of the modern day Orthodox Jews – over their man-made traditions that nullified God’s word!

See **Mark 7:7-8; Matthew 15:7-9**. Another example: Paul says it’s a shame for men to cover their heads in church services (**1 Corinthians 11:4, 7**). But many Hebrew Roots and Messianic men wear a head covering. Paul’s writings were scripture, according to Peter, so don’t dismiss his teaching on head covering (**2 Peter 3:15-16**). And most Hebrew Roots and Messianics I know, teach that we’re in the *Renewed* Covenant – basically the same old covenant polished up and renewed. NO, scripture is so clear in saying it’s a 2nd, brand new covenant, “NOT like the one I gave them when I drew them out of Egypt” – GOD speaking in **Jeremiah 31:31-34**. True, this new second covenant has God’s laws written on our hearts and minds. God’s laws are still a part of it, in other words. So sooner or later you’ll find, as I have, that calling yourself “Messianic” or “Hebrew Roots” doesn’t quite correctly describe you either.

Check out my sermon on how the New Covenant is truly new and not renewed:
<http://www.lightontherock.org/index.php/message/yeshua-his-passover-and-the-new-covenant>

Do you seek DATA (knowledge) or RELATIONSHIP?

But there’s something I have to say to many 7th day sabbath keepers I have known in the various Church of God groups, or Hebraic Roots groups, or Messianic groups. Not all, but quite a few of the zealous defenders of these groups have good Bible *knowledge*. They research a lot. They know Christmas is pagan. They won’t eat pork. They’ve looked into the Hebrew and Greek – especially into the Hebrew.

But let me say right off the bat: you can keep God’s holydays, denounce the pagan holidays of Christmas and Easter and others, you can avoid all unclean meats, and you can keep the 7th day sabbath – **and STILL not be a true follower of Yeshua**, or Jesus Christ. You know why? Because I’ve just described an orthodox Jew.

It's not enough to do all those things unless you start at the right starting spot: and that is to repent of your sin and come under the blood of your Savior – and say so. Even Muslims don't eat pork!

“What must I do to be saved” – the Gentile, Philippian jailer asked Paul. Paul's answer: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved” (See Acts 16:29-34) – not a long list of doctrinal issues. Having right doctrine IS important, but the FIRST doctrine, is that we must repent and then believe in Jesus Christ. The jailer was not a Jew. He had a lot to learn. Paul spoke God's word to them, but how much could you cover? The one thing Paul came down to, the one thing Peter came down to in his sermon in Acts 2, was to repent and accept Yeshua as your savior. The rest can be learned in due season.

I also find a lot of the “anti-Christian label” folks aren't **overflowing with JOY over our salvation**. And so many don't seem to ever overflow with excitement and adoration for their Savior! Why? I sense they fear their judgment. They talk of “making it” into the kingdom or not. So they're in fear of falling short of salvation – because they are also so works-driven, and not very grace driven. They are knowledge- based – and not RELATIONSHIP based.

SO in its simplest form, what is a true Christian? Will this describe YOU?

THE STARTING POINT:

Technically, a “Christian” literally would be someone who follows Christ because they have come to believe He IS the promised Messiah who would save people from their sins. They have repented and accepted him as their SAVIOR – and now BELIEVE in him and trust him for their salvation. That is where it all STARTS, folks, if you are a true follower of Christ, regardless of the label you use. True believers are so excited to learn what Yeshua has done that they can't hold it in! They just have to share it with someone, every chance they get. Have I just described you? If not, examine the relationship aspect of you being a follower of Christ.

Most Christians also believe Jesus Christ – or Yeshua the Messiah – is the **Son of God**, came as God to become **a flesh-and-blood human baby** who grew to be a man, who lived a perfect sinless life, died for our sins and was resurrected after 3 days, and now once again sits beside God Most High, our heavenly Father in heaven. And true Christians trust Yeshua, they trust Jesus – and have immense faith in him.

The key element and starting point here is that we profess to know who Christ is, where he came from, where he is now – and what he stood for, what he believed and taught – and we follow HIM, trust in him, and believe as HE believed. Romans 10:8-11 should be a memory verse....but one not often used by those who believe we must also OBEY. And of course, I teach and believe we must obey also. But let's not ignore blockbuster verses like this one:

Romans 10:8-11

“But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): **9 that if you confess with your MOUTH the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto**

righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Now a lot of believers who are sabbath keepers and read the whole Bible put a lot of focus on doctrine and obedience – and that’s fine – as long as no one forgets this crucial starting point: that we are saved and given eternal life by grace through faith in Him, not because of good things *we’ve* done, but because of His mercy and grace for us.

Titus 3:4-7

“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 **NOT by works of righteousness which WE have done, but according to His MERCY He saved us**, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified [seen as being righteous, made right with God] by HIS GRACE we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

A true Christian puts his focus on what Christ has done more than on what WE are doing – because we are not saved by our good works but by grace through faith in Christ. Am I describing you?

Ephesians 2:8-10

“For by GRACE you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the GIFT of God, 9 **not of works, lest anyone should boast.** 10 For we are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

A true Christian is building a profoundly close relationship with Christ as their center focus– and true doctrine will naturally follow. But one can over-focus on doctrine and never know Christ. We can be like the ancient scribes who searched the scriptures diligently but never came to HIM, that they might have life.

John 5:39

“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing **to come to ME** -- that you may have life!”

Some of you who resent being called a “Christian” because of the flaws you see in that establishment Christianity, just focus on doctrine and on God the Father – and not much really on Jesus, or Yeshua – the son of the Father. This next verse says – in Yeshua’s own words – to be sure to honor him too! Sing about Jesus. Speak of Jesus – as you also do of the Father. Do you sing hymns of praise to and about Jesus? We all *should*!

John 5:22-23

“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, **that all should honor the SON JUST AS they honor the Father.** He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

You can’t read the book of 1 John especially – especially chapters 1, 4 and 5 but really the whole book – without seeing how much John speaks of Yeshua (Jesus). We can’t have the

Father without first having the son. And of course Paul covers that over and over too. So be sure where you worship that they sing praise and honor Yeshua mightily – as well as God our Father.

WHY honor the Son? Because he died so you wouldn’t have to. He took all the judgment and wrath against sin for you -- so that, please get this – so YOU won’t have to be judged for your sins. Christ took your judgment and condemnation for all your sins on himself for you. That’s what **John 3:18 and John 5:24** and other verses clearly say. He became sin for you - **2 Cor 5:21**. So make sure you speak often about CHRIST – it’s all through the New Testament... a constant discussion about Yeshua (Jesus).

I know you all believe this, but sometimes I don’t get the feeling that some of you have voiced this, or are all that excited about this, or have said the words so thankfully – “Lord, I accept you as my Savior, as my King. I know you are the son of God and you lived and died for me and have been resurrected for me. I want to KNOW you, follow you, live like you!”

Paul’s big goal in life was to KNOW Christ and the power of his resurrection – so He could live again in Paul, as Christ did the first time. Philippians 3:9-11.

You see, it’s NOT just about what we believe – but WHOM we are coming to KNOW, intimately know, as our Savior. Knowledge puffs up. True salvation is mostly about our relationship with Christ! Paul said that was the one thing he wanted: “That I may KNOW him...” Phil 3:9-11. Paul didn’t say that I may know all the Greek/Hebrew and all the technicalities of every doctrine – though he probably did. NO, his focus was on knowing the person of Christ.

John 1:12-13

“But as many as received Him [Yeshua], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

So that’s the STARTING point. NOW what comes next in defining a TRUE Christian, a TRUE Follower of Christ?

Some of you are feeling pretty smug about right now because you know you speak often to and of Jesus. You can claim to know Christ, but if you don’t OBEY him – you’re whistling in the wind! It means little to claim you love him but reject his words and commandments. If you have accepted Christ into your life, and he has taken residence inside you by God’s spirit, guess what? HE will LIVE in you as he lived the first time – obediently. Joyfully. Faithfully. Peacefully. Kindly.

Now this is where millions of nominal Christians get off track! They think they just have to say the words of accepting Jesus and then they can do whatever they want after that. Not so, dear brethren. I LOVE the song’s lyrics – “Trust AND Obey”. It’s both. We will obey – if we really believe. Believing in Christ is active.

John 14:15

“If you love Me, **keep** My commandments.”

John 15:9-10

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. 10 **If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.**"

1 John 2:3-6

"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."

As we grow, we should look more and more like Christ – or as Paul puts it: “Until Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). A child walks and looks like and sounds like his father more and more as he/she grows up.

The end time believers are described twice in Revelation as professing the name of Yeshua or Jesus – *and* as being commandment keepers. That’s end time description. We’re not saved by commandment keeping, but by grace through faith. But obedience and good works prove our new life is for real. It proves our salvation – see Eph 2:10.

Revelation 12:17

“And the dragon was enraged with the woman [the true believers], and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, **who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.**”

Revelation 14:12

“Here is the patience of the **saints**; here are those who **keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.**”

So now you who are NOT 7th day sabbath keepers but claim to be a Christian – a follower of the Christ – do you walk as He walked?. I promise you: Christ has never been in pagan Christmas or Easter worship services. That’s not the way he walked or lived or taught. There is NOTHING in scripture about the early believers keeping Easter or Christmas. In fact two of the gospel accounts don’t even tell the story of his birth – and it certainly didn’t happen in December! And what do rabbits and eggs have to do with Easter!? Everything! It goes back to the pagan fertility celebrations that later had an “establishment Christian” label put on it.

Let’s move on: if you believe Christ is your savior and we are saved by grace, do you study God’s instruction Manual – the Bible – from Genesis to maps? Jesus himself said “man shall live by EVERY word of God” (Matthew 4:4). The only available “word of God” at that point – besides Christ in person – *was what we all now call the Old Testament!* So a true Christian accepts EVERY word of Scripture – and not just the New Testament.

Anyway, HE saves us, and now HE lives anew in us. HE is the one working out his plan for us, changing us to be someday in the very image of Christ.

Conclusion of the definition:

Yes – we must start by confessing and professing Christ our Savior. We are thrilled to have a Redeemer and Savior. And once we do, we are indebted now to put to death the past way of life we have had. We ask him to come into our lives and live again in us by his Holy spirit we receive after baptism. Now we want HIM to live in us--- righteously, obediently, humbly and joyfully – as he did before. Going forward, the life we live is not our own, but HIS (Galatians 2:20-21) by faith. We have another nature still that wars against the new nature but we must let Christ live in us.

Romans 8:12-13

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors — not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For **if you live according to the flesh you will die;** but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

A true Christian’s way of life is changing. We’re supposed to be a “new creation” in Him. **We study and learn at Christ’s feet not just for information, but for transformation—to become entirely new, something we have never been before, a new creation in our Messiah.** *If you and I aren’t being transformed, we need to start over and be sure our conversion is for real.* Yes, I preach to myself too. At some point, if God’s words abide in us, we should be, we will be, bearing much fruit (John 15:7-8) and changing.

We will all still fail and stumble from time to time, even as Paul admitted in Romans 7 “That which I hate, I still do”. But as a way of life we must not be stealing, lying, committing adultery or fornication, or shacking up with every one we can. True followers of Christ, true Christians in other words, are keeping the sabbath and honoring God’s name. They’re cleaning up their language – no F words, no taking of God’s name in vain. True Christians brings honor and joy to their parents. They’re all about glorifying God and seeking His will – not theirs. And they’re very obedient to what God says. True Christians fail from time to time. I do. You do. But when we fail, we deeply repent and get back into the war against the flesh and ways of the world.

I refer you to my other sermon – **Biblical SIGNS OF TRUE DISCIPLES (October 2013)** for the list of identifying markers of true Christians, or TRUE followers of Christ, who are not Christian in name only. I urge you to hear/read this teaching also.

<http://www.lightontherock.org/index.php/message/biblical-signs-of-true-disciples>

For example,

- they will abide in his Word (John 8:30-31). You can’t abide and do his word unless you’re studying his word and praying to him, seeking him daily.
- They will have a deep and profound love for one another (John 13:34-35) and not be suing each other or splintering off again and again into ever more “splinter groups”.

Hear that teaching for the full list of points of what a true disciple or Christian is like.

And we’re so thankful we have a Savior who will present us – in him, by him and through Him – as spotless, without fault or wrinkle (Jude 24; Ephesians 5:25-27).

SO – do you, do I want to be called a “Christian”?

SO – do you, do I want to be called a “Christian”?

Given the backdrop of what organized Christianity has largely become, has largely been (organized warfare for centuries, the Inquisition, the tortures and eradication of other believers who believed differently, and how organized Christianity so often teaches doctrines AGAINST the clear word of Scripture... etc.) -- I can very easily see why some don't want the name “Christian” applied to them.

But surely those of you not wanting to be identified with mainstream Christianity – have to also be careful –that you **don't end up denying Christ** in your zeal to make it clear you and I don't keep the pagan holidays. I believe it's far more important that we accept our Savior as our savior, and use His name, and not deny affiliation with the Christ!

We must not be ashamed to be called a follower of Messiah – or a TRUE Christian. I take you back to what Paul and Peter said about “Christian”. Paul – “I wish everyone could be as I (a Christian)”. Peter said, you're blessed if you're called a Christian and glory in this matter, or that name (1 Peter 4:14-16). I'm not better than Paul and Peter, who were honored to carry the name – Christian.

Luke 12:8-9

"Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God."

Peter denied being a follower of Christ – in the fear of the moment (Luke 7:54- 62). In its purest form a “Christian” is one who believes in and follows the Christ. Let's be sure we are not doing the same thing, regardless our motives.

Do we discard a label because it has been misused?

If the label “Christianity” has been badly sullied, should we really discard it – or do our best to show what a true Christian is?

Example: Just because the word “**FATHER**” is so trashed by the conduct of so many dads and fathers – should I now refuse to use the word “Father” to apply to myself or my own dad? Or can I choose to use the term Father as an honorable word, no matter what others do with that word?

Another example: just because so many have been dishonorable “**Americans**” – should I no longer call myself an “American”?

So be careful, those of you who wish to distance yourself from “Christian”. Be careful you don't end up being perceived denying being a follower of Christ. Be careful that your caution is not misunderstood for being something other than a follower of Christ.

Mark 8:38

“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

So are you a Christian?

So if I were asked, “Are you a Christian?” ... if the one questioning is a terrorist with a gun, I’d have to immediately acknowledge that yes I am and be sure in no way to deny my Savior.

What about those Egyptian Coptic Christians who were beheaded by ISIS Muslim butchers? No doubt they had many beliefs different from yours and mine. But it was reported the last word on their lips as their throats were being slit – was “Jesus...”

Am I to distance myself from those brave and faithful souls? Would *I* have risen to that standard of quiet faith and been so brave and faithful under the same circumstances? Would YOU have?

If anyone else is asking me if I am a Christian, I would answer with a question: “First tell me what you mean by “Christian””. And then based on his/her answer, I would explain that “yes, I believe in Yeshua – or Jesus Christ – and have given my life over to him and seek to absolutely follow him . And yes, I follow what the Bible teaches – including keeping the 7th day sabbath, and obeying God’s commandments, as proof that I am obedient to God.

*I would say that, IF necessary, to differentiate myself from the mainstream Christianity and people who are Christian-in-name-only and don’t really practice what the Bible teaches. If time permitted, I’d explain that I also believe I’ve been saved by grace through faith, and the obedience that follows is proof of the life transformed. But my works won’t and don’t save me for eternity, but will be the basis of my **rewards** (“rewarded according to their works” –Revelation 20:12, etc. It doesn’t say “saved according to their works”.)*

I often use, as you know, the words “believer” or “follower” or “saint” or “ekklesia” in defining true believers in Christ.

GREETING AND MEETING ONLY WITH PEOPLE LIKE YOU?

One more thing: so many of you – especially the 7th day Sabbath keeping groups and Hebrew Roots and COGs – just keep to yourselves. You don’t mingle with your neighbors or people at work.

You may be doing that because some of you confuse loving the world with loving the people. I’ll write a blog on that soon. We are to come OUT of the world – it’s ways – but remember Yeshua sent his disciples INTO the world (the people). God so loved the world... remember?

Many of them might not even know you believe in Christ or keep the sabbath. ...because you’re very quiet about it all. You would never have a friend who is a known “sinner” – whether known adulterer, liar, thief, homosexual or idolater. But are not a former sinner

yourself? Do you not still sin from time to time? I do have friends who are not perfect. And I’m sure glad they accept me as their friend, as imperfect as I am for that matter.

What was Yeshua’s example?

He was known as a **“Friend of sinners” (Luke 7:34)**. I know, he also said “go and sin no more” , but he didn’t distance himself from people of ill repute. In fact the woman at the well who was a known adulterer was so taken by his words and love that she told the whole city (John 4). The first human being to see the risen Christ was a woman out of whom 7 demons had been cast. Imagine letting HER be your first eye-witness! It says a lot about our Savior.

Matthew 5:46-48

“For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? **And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others?** Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

Just because a professing Christian doesn’t know or practice or accept all your doctrinal beliefs doesn’t mean God isn’t hearing their prayers. I know God has heard and answered many prayers from people who are not 7th day sabbath keepers. So that should tell us something too. I could give 5 sermons just listing answered prayers of our nation’s leaders, of our military leaders through history and prayers of regular ordinary people like you and me.

Paul and the apostles spent time preaching to – and therefore mingling with -- sinners and pagans. Today preaching by internet takes the “mingling” out of it and we lose much of the impact. That’s too bad.

So all in all – I must say, YES, I am a Christian and so humbled and honored to be given the opportunity to use that name and label. I love my Savior – Yeshua the Messiah, or as most of you say – Jesus the Christ. He is the Captain of my Salvation, Redeemer of my life and soul, he is His Majesty the Son of God – who died for ME, and died for YOU, paid the penalty of our sins and has been resurrected for our justification (righteousness) (Romans 4:22-25). His name is Yeshua the Messiah, or Jesus the Christ.

Yes, yes, Yes – I am a follower of the one true Christ. So YES, I am a Christian, I am a disciple, I am a believer in Christ. I am all of those things. I look first to him, and let him live in me – and because of that, I keep the commandments of God by His spirit as best I can, and repent quickly when I often fail. I keep the 7th day Sabbath and God’s holydays. I read the whole Bible – Genesis to Revelation. But most of all, I keep my Savior in my heart and mind and praise my heavenly Father for so generously giving us His Son that we might be forgiven and have everlasting life.

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