



ISSUE

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# Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF  
THE OL-  
SEN PARK  
CHURCH OF  
CHRIST

## Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

## Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

## Deacons:

Steve Dixon

Ryan Ferguson

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McNear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Kevin Wise

Trevor Yontz

## Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

## Am I a Christian?

By Kyle Pope

When my daughter was a baby she loved apples. There were many mornings when Toni and I went to wake her expecting to hear “hi” or “I love you” only to be greeted instead with the words “apple, apple, apple. . .” We knew just how much she loved apples when one day as a baby she seemed to be trying, by her word alone, to change the food she held in her hand into an apple—looking at it and repeating over and over “apple, apple, apple. . .” To her disappointment, no matter how hard she tried she never succeeded in changing her bread, corn, or broccoli into an apple.

We smile at the thought of a small child thinking that simply calling something a certain name for long enough could make it what she wanted it to be, but sadly the same thing is done all around us by those who should be old enough to know better. Millions of people call themselves *Christians*, but does simply calling myself a Christian mean that I am truly a Christian? If I do not possess those qualities the Bible teaches identify one as a Christian, does saying the name over and over magically make it so? For anyone who realizes the inevitability of death and final judgment a most important question for each of us to ask ourselves is how can I know if I am truly a Christian or just a lost sinner in disguise?

The world offers a variety of answers to this question, most of which will leave us puzzled and confused because they are often

inconsistent and contradictory. There is only one way I can know for certain what a Christian truly is—by looking to the Bible. It describes those who were first identified as Christians. If I am willing to do what they did, no matter what anyone else says, I can know that I am in fact a *Christian*.

Let's see if this approach is valid. In the second chapter of the book of Acts we have recorded the first account of people becoming Christians. The apostle Peter had preached to the Jews visiting Jerusalem for Pentecost and after his lesson some who heard it became convinced that they needed to follow Jesus. Scripture tells us that they asked Peter, **"what shall we do?"** (Acts 2:37). Peter responded, **"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. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call"** (Acts 2:38-39, NKJV). The Bible tells us that many responded to Peter's words. Two verses after this we learn that **"those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them"** (Acts 2:41).

What does this teach us? We see that those who heard Peter's message were told to **"repent"** and **"be baptized."** We must note, however, that although the text only tells us that they were baptized, the inference is that those who obeyed also repented because it says they **"received his word"** and were **"added to them."** What does it mean to *repent*? In the gospel of Luke we read of John the Baptist's teaching on repentance. From his description it becomes clear that repentance involves realizing things that are wrong in one's life and turning away from them. John told the people to **"bear fruits worthy of repentance"** (Luke 3:8). He even gave examples of this fruit as he urged people to turn away from sinful practices and begin good practices (Luke 3:10-14). This shows us that if we, like those on the day of Pentecost, would be faithful to the command to "repent" we must commit ourselves to turn away from those things that displease God and strive to understand and obey God's will, doing what pleases Him. In other words, we must *change our direction*.

Peter also commanded them to **"be baptized"** (Acts 2:38). What does this mean? The Bible tells us about a two different



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types of baptism. John’s baptism was called a **“baptism of repentance”** (Luke 3:1). This was not the same as the baptism commanded by Peter on the day of Pentecost. We know this because of an account recorded in Acts 19:1-10 in which some who had received John’s baptism were then baptized into Christ. John’s baptism was to prepare Jews for the coming of Christ. It didn’t involve a new relationship with God, a new covenant, or a new faith.

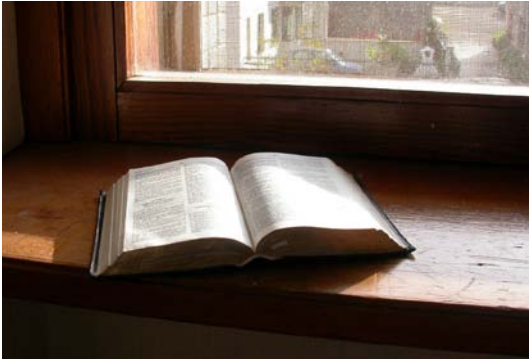
We should note that the very word **“baptized”** tells us something about what it is. Dictionaries and lexicons tell us that the word literally means to *dip* or *immerse*, which we can verify from Scripture. The only examples the Scriptures ever give us involve complete immersion of the person baptized. It is also important to note that the baptism described in Acts two was not something that *followed* salvation or was done simply to make a person a part of a local congregation. Romans 6:1-6 teaches that baptism brings a person **“into Christ”** whereby one has **“died to sin.”** Thus for a person today to be faithful to the command to “be baptized” he or she must be immersed for the remission of sins so that God might add that person to the body of Christ (cf. Acts 2:47).

Are these things all that a person must do to be a Christian? We saw in Acts that Scripture sometimes doesn’t record everything that happened even when instructions concerning other things are given elsewhere. We saw that the people were commanded to **“repent”** and **“be baptized”** so we can infer that they did both even though only their baptism is specifically mentioned (see Acts 2:38, 41). In such a case reference to baptism cites a part of something as representative of the whole process. If we look at all of Scripture we can see at least two other initial things that are also a part of this process: *faith* and *confession of Christ*.

Paul told the Romans, **“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead. you will be saved”** (Ro-

mans 10:9). Now was Paul teaching something different from what Peter taught on the day of Pentecost? No. Paul also taught *baptism* (Rom. 6:1-6) and *repentance* (Rom. 2:4). Paul is simply addressing two other parts of the process of conversion. After all, how can a person “repent” of past sins if he or she is unwilling to *confess* Jesus to others? Or how can a person “be baptized” into Christ if he or she has never come to believe in Christ? Faith is the glue that binds the whole process together. Without it all the rest is worthless.

This is why in some passages faith is cited as a part representative of the whole process of conversion. This is why Christians are described as, **“saved through faith”** (Eph. 2:8). That doesn’t mean *faith only*—if so, simply having *any faith* in *any thing* would merit salvation. Salvation is only merited by Christ’s blood. I must believe in Christ and His sacrifice on my behalf. I cannot do enough good to forgive my own sins. But that doesn’t mean that my actions play no part in obeying the gospel. What it means is that the kind of faith that is involved in salvation is one



that works together with my obedient actions so that (as James says of Abraham) **“by works faith was made perfect”** (Jas. 2:22).

Many people like to think of being a Christian as a type of cultural heritage or a family legacy, as if since one’s parents are Christians he or she is automatically a Christian. The Bible tells us that when the name Christian was first applied it was given to those who were **“disciples”** (Acts 11:26). To be a *Christian* then is to be a follower or disciple of Christ. It is not something that can be handed down—it must be

a characteristic of one’s own life. Acts 2:42 tells us that those who obeyed Peter’s instructions **“continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”** Thus they were not only followers in their initial responses to the gospel, but also through a continual process of following Jesus within their lives. This is part of what defines one as a Christian at any given point in

life. Jesus said, **“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed”** (John 8:31). If I am not following Jesus by abiding in His word, I am not a *disciple* and therefore not a *Christian*. Why must we reject the error and false teaching of human denominations? Because they teach people things outside of God’s word, all the while claiming to be Christ’s disciples!

So what have we found? We have seen from the Scriptures that simply using the name “Christian” doesn’t make a person a Christian. A Christian is one who is obedient to God’s commands initially and then lives as a disciple from that point on. The question is have I done that? Am I doing that? If so, I am a Christian. If not, simply calling myself a “Christian” won’t make it true any more than calling a piece of broccoli an “apple” will change it into an apple. 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”** (Matt. 7:21).

