

WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

1 John 5:13

Intro: I have not checked my notes to confirm what I am about to say, but I am quite sure that in my first message on this series, or early in the series, I pointed out to you from my text that we are considering today, that in this verse the Apostle John was expressing his main purpose in writing this epistle. (Read it.) And in saying that I am supported, I believe, by the majority of expositors who have written commentaries on 1 John. And I still believe that is a true statement of his purpose in writing this epistle. In going through the epistle I have point out to you what “these things” are. Primarily it has to do with three practical things:

- 1) A true Christian’s attitude and relationship toward sin.
- 2) A true Christian’s attitude toward the Word of God, and, in particular, to the commandments of Scripture. A true Christian wants to live a life that is pleasing to God, and he soon learns, or should learn, that this means obeying the commandments of Scripture.
- 3) A true Christian’s attitude toward other believers. Or I could state it this way – a different attitude toward the Church. But even in daily life a true Christian avoided being with Christians before he was saved, but after he is saved, his best friends are other Christians.

Now the Apostle John emphasizes these points not just once or twice, but three times. And repetition in Scripture is always for the sake of emphasizing things that are important. They were important in the first century (and even before that), and they are still important today. In no way does this epistle written at the end of the first century, need to be revised to describe us as Christians today. If the Apostle John could write to us today about how we can know that we are Christians, his letter would be identical to this letter of 1 John in our Bibles.

But, in the light of what the Apostle John wrote at the end of the first century, any discerning person who knows the Lord would have to say that there are many people today who call themselves Christians, are not really Christians. And I don’t think that this is anything new. I think that this fact probably was one of the main reasons the Holy Spirit led the Apostle John to write this letter even in those days.

It was the Apostle John who has told us in his Gospel that as a result of our Lord’s teaching, “From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him” (John 6:66). What does this mean, that

they had salvation, and lost it? No, it simply means that they never were saved. They were recognized as disciples of the Lord, but it was only in the name.

Actually the term Christian is used only three times in the Bible. We are told in Acts 11:26 that “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” Then in Acts 26:28 after Paul had made his defense before King Agrippa, he said to Paul, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” The third and last time that term “Christian” is used is in 1 Peter 4:16 where Peter had said in verse 15,

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

And then he followed that with this in verse 16:

16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

It seems that the term Christian probably originated with people in the world to identify people who were followers of Christ. So the Apostle Paul never used it of believers, neither did John. And probably Peter used it to show what believers in Christ were persecuted, *i.e.*, because of their identification with Christ. Thayer in his Greek Lexicon says that from the second century on it was accepted by Christians as a title of honor. In our own beloved country the term is widely used by Christians and non-Christians alike, *but the Apostle John, and all of the writers of the NT described the people of God and by what they believed and the way they lived.* The Apostle John called us “the sons of God,” but better translated, *the children of God.* Remember that in 1 John 5:1 the Apostle John said that “whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” If we are born of God, that means we have divine life, and are members of the family of God.

The Message

Now perhaps you have noticed from your reading of 1 John that there are four times the Apostle John used the expression, “These things have I written unto you,” of something very similar to it. The first time is in 1:4. The second time is in 2:1. The third is in 2:26. And the fourth is in our text for today: 5:13.

Now when you go back and read those verses, and see in each case what the Apostle John was saying, they include all that he was writing about,

and not just the practical things which, of course, were a major part of what he had written, but not all. And I believe that when the Apostle John wrote 5:13, he was referring to all that he had written, not just how a child of God lives, but also what a child of God lives. The disciples who departed from the Lord did not depart from Him because of His character or behavior (the way He lived), but because of what He taught, His doctrine. It is very hard for anyone to criticize the character of Jesus Christ, but people had trouble with His doctrine, even His teaching concerning Himself. A lot of people recognize that Jesus was a good person, but they balk at His claim that He was uniquely the Son of God.

Now time will not permit me to go through the whole epistle in this service to touch on all that the Apostle John was referring to when he said, "These things," but I would just like to get you thinking about what it takes to make a person in reality, a true Christian, a child of the living God, a believer, and a saint. I am not including those verses in chapter 2 which have to do with particular groups in the church, as in verses 12-14, but those which emphasize some of the major doctrines of our faith which have their application to our lives today.

Let us look at 1:4 first. Some MSS read "your joy," others read, "our joy." We can say that what the Apostle John was writing had brought him fulness of joy, and it would bring the same joy to anyone who believes what he believed. But what did he believe? To summarize the first three verses of chapter 1 we have to say that the Apostle John firmly believed in the absolute Deity of the God the Father and "His Son Jesus Christ." In order to be a Christian you have to believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and that just as God was light, righteous, and holy, without any sin, the same is true of His Son. He was from the beginning, and so He was uncreated and eternal just like the Father. He was absolutely sinless. The Apostle John knew Him personally, and intimately, and knew that Jesus had never sinned. He could not sin because He was God the Son.

Let us look secondly, at 2:1. Now the first point that the Apostle John made here was one that we have seen repeatedly throughout the epistle. And that is that a true Christian, a true child of God, is a person who no longer finds any pleasure in sin, and who knows he is under divine orders not to sin. And this includes little sins and big sins, open sins and secret sins, all sins. But he knows also that if He does sin, Jesus Christ is His advocate with the Father. An advocate is a Paraclete. Christ is the pro-

pitiation for our sins. When Christ died for our sins, he died for all of our sins – past, present, and future. Actually when Christ died all of our sins were future. We confess our sins, and our fellowship with God is restored. There is no such thing as being saved a second time. There is no need for a second salvation because the first is eternal.

But there is one other point that a true Christian believes, and that is that Jesus Christ is the only Savior for people throughout the whole world in every generation. Cf. John 14:6 and Acts 4:12. It will take any Christian some time to learn all of this, but when he is exposed to these truths, he will have no argument with them.

Now let us go on to 2:26, and this really goes back to 2:21. In the Apostle John's day the NT had not yet been all put together, but there were strong convictions among the people of God as to the truthfulness of what they had been taught. Today we have it all in the sixty-six books of the Bible. And the believers were firmly convinced in the truth of what they had been taught by the apostles. And so we learn from this is that a true Christian takes the Bible as his only rule of faith (what he is to believe) and practice (how he is to live). Books about the Bible have to be accepted only to the extent that they agree with the Bible. False teachers always have opposed some of the teachings of Scripture, but where there is a conflict, the Bible is the truth. And a true Christian always puts the Bible first. God has given the Holy Spirit to every believer whose responsibility it is to teach believers the truth. A true Christian believes this. The Bible was given to us as men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. See 2 Peter 1:21.

And now we come to our text in 5:13. The last phrase of this verse is not found in some of the better MSS, but can have its application on these other points because the things which the Apostle John has mentioned need to be a part of what true Christians believe.

Remember that we have in verses 11 and 12 the witness of God, the Father. And it is that we have eternal life which has come to us through God's Son. It is "in Him," and remains in Him. A true Christian (as has been emphasized in what we have already seen) is in Christ and in no one else. He is the true Savior, the only Savior. A person who claims to be a Christian, but who is not indwelt by the Son of God, does not have life. And there are no exceptions to this.

The question is often raised, Is it possible for people to be saved in some other way except in Christ? And many professing Christians respond by saying that there is. *But the Word of God plainly tells us that there is just one Savior for the whole world, and His Name is the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Verse 15 is rendered several different ways in different translations, but the statement “that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” conveys the thought that a true Christian believes in all that is expressed by the Name of the Son of God. His name is the Lord Jesus Christ. Beware of the person who always and only refers to our Lord as Jesus. There are times when it is perfectly proper to speak of Him as Jesus. But a true believer believes, and continues to believe all that is implied in the Name of God’s Son which is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Concl: Theologians, when summarizing what the Bible teaches about the Lord Jesus Christ, speak of His Person and His work, that is, Who He is (His Person), and His work (what He has done, and what He continues to do). A true believer believes all that the Bible teaches about the Lord Jesus Christ. The value of what He has done rests firmly upon Who He is. To minimize His Person in any way, is to throw doubt upon the value of what the Bible teaches that He has done. To believe that Jesus is the Son of God, is to know that we have eternal life.