

# Who Is Not a Christian?

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The word *Christian* appears three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). This term is used interchangeably with *disciple*, but only after Jesus died and built His church. Most people apply *Christian* indiscriminately to anyone who gives even the least lip service to Jesus and/or his doctrine. But by Bible definition, who, in fact, is a Christian?

Determining who is **not** a Christian may help us answer this question.

- **No Old Testament saints** were Christians. Verily, many godly men and women lived before Christ came, but *Christian* never applied to any who lived before Jesus died and built His church (cf. passages cited above.)
- **Not all “good people”** are Christians, although all true Christians are good people. Cornelius was “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:1-2). He lived a good life and had a good reputation (v. 22), but he was not a Christian until he heard, believed in, and obeyed Christ in baptism (vv. 33, 47-48). A morally upright life is commendable, but it does not make one a Christian.
- **Not all religious people** are Christians, although all true Christians are religious. Paul described the Athenians as “very religious” (Acts 17:22), but they were devoted to paganism; they were not Christians. The great crowd on Pentecost was composed of “devout people” (2:5), but they were Jews, not Christians. The same was true of the Ethiopian (8:27-28), Lydia (16:13-15), and Saul of Tarsus (26:5).
- **Not all church members** are Christians, although all true Christians are members of Jesus’ church. The Lord built His church (Mat. 16:18). It began on the Pentecost after God raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:47). It is composed of Disciples – Christians (8:1-3; 9:1; 11:26). One becomes a Christian by confessing his faith, repenting of his sins, and being baptized to receive forgiveness of his sins (Acts 2: 37-38, 41, 47). Membership in a denomination does not make one a Christian. The Bible knows nothing of the denominational system that came into existence in the 1500s.
- **Not all believers in Christ** are Christians, although all true Christians must believe in Christ. If mere “faith” were sufficient, the demons would be Christians (Jam. 2:19). Inactive “faith” is dead “faith” (vv. 20, 24, 26; Gal. 5:6). Saying “Lord, Lord” is not enough to make one a Christian. One must obey God’s will through Christ (Mat. 7:21-23).

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