

Lesson 7

What it means to be a Christian according to St. Paul?

Who is a christian? The term "Christian," as we understand it, refers to anyone, man, woman, or child, who trusts in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and Lord and who strives to follow Him in every area of life, having a *personal relationship* with Jesus Christ. We try to live this relationship through prayer, study of God's Word, worship in the community, fellowship with God's people, and service to others in Jesus' name. But in the final analysis, it's an intensely personal and individual matter, not a question of church membership or doctrinal orientation. The Bible backs us up in this regard: " *Whoever* calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13; Joel 2:32).

It's important to know that Christianity has been shaped as a religion in the historic councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon. These councils formulated important theological definitions and made crucial statements about the Trinitarian nature of God and the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. If want to really identify the personal "attributes" or "characteristics" that distinguish a true Christian from a non-Christian, we would have to go by the word of Jesus " This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

What are the symbols of christians? The most famous and widespread Christian symbol is the cross . It is found wherever there is a Christian presence. For Christians, the cross has become a symbol not only of Jesus' death, but also of his resurrection. Fish is one of the oldest Christian symbols. It was used by Christians to identify themselves and each other, often in times of persecution. It is often found in the Roman catacombs, a secret meeting place during the time when the Christians were persecuted for their faith by the Romans. What Is the Meaning of the Fish? The Greek word for fish is "Ichthus," which is also an acronym for Jesus. The Latin, "Iesus CHristos THEou Uios Soter" translated in English as, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour." Christ also referred to his apostles as "Fishers of Men," while the early Christian fathers called the faithful "pisculi," which means "fish.

Term clarification: The word "Christian" is used three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Followers of Jesus Christ were first called "Christians" in Antioch (Acts 11:26) because their behavior, activity, and speech were like Christ. The word "Christian" literally means, "belonging to the party of Christ" or a "follower of Christ." Before this term Christians came into existence, they were known as **disciples, Way, Nazareans and Sect**

Way: Act 9:2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Act 19:9 Acts 19:23 Act 24:14 Act 24:22)

Nazareans: Act 24:5 For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of *the sect of the Nazarenes*.

Sect: Act 28:22 But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to *this sect* we know that everywhere it is spoken against.” Act 24:14 But this I confess to you, that according to *the Way*, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, Act 24:5 For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

But, soon, early Christianity was challenged by Roman persecution. The majority of the persecution began with the great fire in Rome that destroyed much of the city and devastated the economy. In an attempt to absolve himself, the Roman Emperor Nero claimed it was the Christians who tried to destroy Rome and its pagan gods. From that point on, the Christians were blamed for many of the misfortunes befalling the Empire. Persecution and martyrdom was quick to follow. Because of this persecution, the early Christians were forced to meet in the catacombs, which were long, dark galleries under the city of Rome. There they continued their meetings, baptisms, and even burials for their dead. As a result of the persecution, many of the early Christians were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, expediting the cause of evangelism and fulfilling the Lord’s commands to make disciples of all nations (Acts 8:1, 4-40; 11:19-26; Matthew 28:18-20).

The early Christians had a pure, simplistic approach. The people were able to concentrate on the study of God’s Word, service and dedication to one another, hospitality, benevolence, and missions (Romans 1:8; 15:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8; Acts 13:1-26:32). The programs and technology present in many churches today can be useful tools in helping us emphasize the same things, but can also sometimes be distractions. Compared to the structured organization of the church today, the early church looked more like the informal settings of one of our Bible studies or small groups.

Both early Christianity and modern Christianity have good and bad characteristics, and neither can be idealized. The positives which characterized the early church—a passion for Christ and His Word and a strong love for one another—are what we should strive to emulate in the modern church.

Acts 2:42-46 Witness life of the Early Christian community: Those new Christians were united with other believers. They were taught by the apostles. They spent in prayer and they grew in fellowship. Like early Christians, we need to be in groups to learn God’s word, pray and mature in faith. This is a great way to grow in faith and helping others to grow. Breaking of bread refers to the Eucharist Celebrations that were celebrated in the remembrance of Jesus who commanded to celebrate. Recognizing other believers as brothers and sisters in the family of God, the Christians in Jerusalem shared all they had so that all could benefit from God’s gifts. As part of God’s family, it is our responsibility to help one another in every way possible. God’s family works best when its members work together.

Acts 4:32-35 Spiritual Unity among the Christians: Differences of opinion are inevitable among human personalities and can actually be helpful if handled well. But spiritual unity is essential – loyalty, commitment, and love for God and his Word. Without spiritual unity, the church could not survive. Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians to urge the church in Corinth toward greater unity. None of the Christians felt that what they had was their own and so they were able to give and share, eliminating poverty among them. They would not let a brother or sister suffer when others had plenty. We should adopt the attitude that everything we have comes from God and we are only sharing what is already his. This is called responsible stewardship. The early church was able to share possessions and property as a result of the unity brought by the Holy Spirit working in and through the believers' lives. This way of living is different from Communism because 1) The sharing was voluntary 2) It did not involve all private property but only as much as needed. The spiritual unity and generosity of these early believers attracted others to them

What are the core of Christian Values? Romans 12:9-21

12:9 Be sincere in your love: Most of us know and have learned in the course of our life how to love others, speak kindly and avoid hurting others and their feelings. But God calls us to real and sincere love for each other that goes far beyond our learning, pretense and politeness. Sincere love requires concentration and effort. It means helping others to become better people with sincere effort.

12:10 How to honor others? We can honor others in 2 ways (human and divine way). Human way involves ulterior motives - honoring our boss expecting a reward/ rewarding an employee demanding their handwork/ honoring the wealthy for any favor. As Christians, we honor people because they have been created in God's image, because they are our brothers and sisters in Christ and because they have a unique contribution to make to Christ' church.

12:13 what is Christian hospitality? it differs from social entertaining. Entertaining focuses on the host - the home must be spotless, the food must be well prepared and abundant; the host must be good natured and relaxed. Hospitality, by contrast, focuses on the guests. Their needs, food, listening ear and acceptance are the primary concern. Hospitality can happen in a messy home. Hospitality does not have to take place around a table. It can be given with a smile, empathetic tears, or an encouraging word. Let us not hesitate to offer hospitality just because we are too tired, too busy, or not wealthy enough to entertain. Jesus enjoyed hospitality of the people and He was hospitable to the disciples including Judas. (Martha- Jesus in Luke 10 / widow of Shunem - Elisha 2 Kings 4) Hebrews 13:2/ 1 Peter 4:9/Luke 14

12:17-21 These verses summarize the core of Christian living. If we love someone the way Christ loves us, we will be willing to forgive. If we have experienced God's grace, we will want to pass it on to others. Grace is undeserved favor. By giving an enemy a

drink, we are not excusing his/ her misdeeds. We are recognizing him/her, forgiving and loving them in spite of their sins -Just as Christ did for us.

12:19-21 How to forgive? In this day of constant lawsuits and incessant demands for legal rights, Paul's command sounds almost impossible. When someone hurts us deeply, instead of giving them what they deserve, Paul says to befriend them. Why does Paul tell us to forgive our enemies? 1. Forgiveness may break a cycle of retaliation and lead to mutual reconciliation. 2. It may make the enemy feel ashamed and change his or her ways 3. Repaying evil for evil hurts us as much as it hurts our enemy. Even if our enemy never repents, forgiving him or her will free us of a heavy load of bitterness.

Forgiveness involves both attitude and actions. If we find it difficult to feel forgiving toward someone who has hurt us, let us try responding with kind actions. If appropriate, tell the person that you would like to heal your relationship. Lend them a helping hand. Send them a gift. Smile at them because right actions will lead to right feelings.

12:20 "you will **heap burning coals** upon his head" what is this heaping burning coals? It is a proverb. It refers to an Egyptian tradition of carrying a pan of burning charcoal on one's head as a public act of repentance. By referring to this proverb, Paul is saying that we should treat our enemies with kindness so that they will become ashamed and turn from their sins. The best way to get rid of enemies is to turn them into friends.

Anecdote: President Abraham Lincoln spoke kindly of his enemies. His friend said, "You must destroy them with your power". Lincoln replied, "**I destroy them by making them my friends**" Destruction not of the enemies but of the feeling of enmity.

Christian approach to governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7): There are times that we should not submit to the government. We should never allow government to force us to disobey God. Jesus and his disciples never disobeyed the government for personal reasons. When they disobeyed, it was in order to follow their higher loyalty to God and for that they paid price: threatened, tortured, beaten, thrown into Jail, executed.

How to be a member of God's family? Romans 2:28-29 To be a Jew means to be in God's family, an heir to all his promises. Yet Paul made it clear that membership in God's family is based on internal, not external qualities. All whose hearts are right with God are real God's children. Attending Church and reception of sacraments should sink with heartfelt devotion and obedience to Jesus and his church.

As Christians, how should we view our governing authorities? We agree that we are to live at peace with the state as long as the state allows us to live by our religious convictions. Some believe that state government is so corrupt that Christians should have as little to do with it as possible. Others believe that God has given the state authority in certain areas and the church authority in others. Christians can be loyal to both and can work for either. Few others believe that Christians have a responsibility to make the state better. They can do so politically, by electing Christian and or other high principled leaders. They can also do this morally by serving as an influence for good in

society. In the view, church and state ideally work together for the good of all. None of these three views advocate rebelling against or refusing to obey the government's laws or regulations unless those laws clearly require us to violate the moral standards revealed by God. We must be responsible citizens as well as responsible Christians. When civil rulers are unjust, upright people are afraid. In these verses, Paul is talking about officials who are doing their duty. When these officials are just, people who are doing right have nothing to fear.

1 Corinthians 13:13 Faith, Hope and Love are at the heart of the Christian life. Our relationship with God begins with Faith which helps us realize that we are delivered from our past by Christ's death. Hope grows as we learn all that God has in mind for us. It gives us the promise of the future. God's love fills our lives and gives us the ability to reach out to others.

How to deal with unbelievers? 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul is describing characteristics of unbelievers. He does not mean that idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers are automatically excluded from heaven. Christians come out of all kinds of different backgrounds, including these. They may still struggle with these but they should not continue in these practices. In 6:11, Paul clearly states that even those who sin in these ways can have their lives changed by Christ. However, those who say that they are Christians but persist in these practices with no sign of remorse will not inherit the kingdom of God. In a permissive society like ours, it is easy for us to overlook or tolerate some immoral behavior but as Christians, we cannot condone it in any way, nor may we be selective about what we condemn and excuse. Staying away from more acceptable forms of sin is difficult but God expects us in any age and time to have high standards.

What is true freedom? 1 Corinthians 6:12 Freedom is a mark of the Christian faith. Our Christian freedom is not doing anything we want but doing the right thing at any time in the eyes of God. Christian freedom is inseparable tied to Christian responsibility. Some misapply the words, "everything is permissible for me". Some actions may not be sinful in themselves but they may not be appropriate because they can control our lives and lead us to sin. Some actions may hurt others. We should not abuse freedom. Drinking too much leads to alcoholism. Eating too much leads to obesity. It is true that God allows us to enjoy. That does not mean that we can allow ourselves into bad habits that control our life.

Do not be yoked with unbelievers: 2 Corinthians 6:14-19 Paul urges believers not to form binding relationships with nonbelievers, because this might weaken their Christian commitment, integrity or standards. It would be a mismatch. He does not advocate isolation from nonbelievers (1 Cor 5:9). He even tells Christians to stay with their nonbelieving spouses (1 Cor 7:12,13). He wants believers to be active in their witness for Christ to nonbelievers but they should not lock themselves into personal or business relationships that could cause them to compromise the faith. Believers should do everything in their power to avoid situations that could force them to divide their

loyalties. It is unlikely to be completely separate from all sinful influences. Nevertheless we are to resist the sin around us

Slave and Master relationship (Ephesians 6:1-4): Slaves played a significant part in the society. There were several million of them in the Roman Empire at that time. Because many slaves and owners had become Christians, the early church had to deal with the question of master and slave relationship. Paul's statement neither condemns or condones slavery. Instead, it tells masters and slaves how to live together in Christian households.

Ephesians 6:6-8 Paul speaks about responsibility and integrity on the job. Christian employees should do their job as if Jesus were their supervisor. Christian employers should treat their employees fairly and with respect. Although we are at different levels, we are all equal before God. He does not play favorites. No one is more important than anyone else.

Husband and wife relationship Ephesians (5:22-33): Paul tells wives to submit and husbands to love and for that He brings the model of Jesus loving the Church and the Church being loyal to Jesus. Some people especially feminists have difficulty to go with the St. Paul's statement in this passage when he speaks about wife's submission to husband. Why Paul told wives to submit to husbands? According to the Bible, the man is the spiritual head of the family and his wife should acknowledge his leadership. St. Paul brings the analogy of Jesus loving the church. Just as Jesus served the disciples even to the point of washing their feet, so the husband is to serve his wife. A wise and Christ honoring husband will not take advantage of his leadership role and a wise and Christ honoring wife will not try to undermine her husband's leadership. Either approach causes disunity and friction in marriage. Mutual submission to each other bring unity and harmony in the family.

Parent child relationship: Ephesians 6:1-4 If our faith in Christ is real, it will usually prove itself at home in our relationship with those who know us best. Children and parents have a great responsibility to each other. Children should honor their parents even if the parents are demanding. Parents should care for their children even if the children are disobedient and unpleasant. The purpose of parental discipline is to help children grow, not to exasperate and provoke them to anger or discouragement. Parenting takes a lot of patience to raise children in a loving, Christ honoring manner.

Care for your families (Ephesians 5:1-10) Paul wanted Christian families to be as self supporting as possible. He insisted that children and grandchildren take care of the widows in their families. He suggested younger widows to remarry and start new families. Widows were usually unable to support themselves. The responsibility for caring for the helpless naturally falls first on their families. Paul stresses the importance of families caring for the needs of widows and any leaving them alone. If the family members do not take care of the widows, the church as the family of God has to take care of them like in the early church. They gave their valuable service to the church.

Almost everyone has relatives, family of some kind. Family relationships are so important in God's eyes. A person who neglects his or her family responsibilities has denied the faith

Need of money Vs Love of Money (1 Timothy 6:6-10) Despite overwhelming evidence of the miseries, brought by Love of Money, most people still believe that money brings happiness. People who crave for more money can be easily caught up in ruin and destruction. How can we keep away from the love of money? Paul gives us some guidelines. Realization that money will be gone one day/ having contentment with what we have/ importance of knowing the need for more money/ loving people more than money/ loving God's work more than money / freely sharing what we have with others. It is often helpful to distinguish between needs and wants. We may have all we need to live but let ourselves become anxious and discontented over what we truly want. Paul says us that we have to choose to be content without having all that we want. Greed leads to all kinds of evil. How to master greed? Control it at its root and get rid of the desire to be rich.

Place of prayer in Christian life: Col 1:9-14 Sometimes we wonder how to pray for others whom we have not met. Paul often prayed for believers like Colossians even before meeting them in person. His prayers teach us how to pray for others whether we know them or not. We can request that they understand God's will, gain spiritual wisdom, please and honor God, bear good fruit, grow in the knowledge of God, and be filled with God's strength, have great endurance and patience and stay full of Christ' joy. All the believers have these same basic needs.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 Although God is all powerful and all knowing, he has chosen to let us help him change the world through our prayers. Paul urges to pray for our leaders in government. Our earnest prayers will have powerful results. Paul's context was dealing with Nero, a notoriously cruel ruler and emperor at that time. When the great fire broke out in Rome, he blamed the Christians for it and started persecuting the Christians throughout the Roman Empire. When our lives are going along peacefully and quietly, it is difficult to remember to pray for those in authority because we often take good government for granted. It is easier to remember and pray during our problems. But we should pray for those in authority around the world so that they societies will be conducive to the spread of the gospel.

Pray at all times: Persevering in prayer helps us to purify our prayer. St. Paul tells us to "pray without ceasing" in the book of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. "pray at all times" in the book of Ephesians 6:18, "be steadfast in prayer" in the book of Colossians 4:2. The message is clear enough. Firstly when we really want something from God, we must keep asking. Secondly, we are not dealing with a stranger but with a loving and generous Father who knows what to give and when to give and how to give.

Thankfulness: how to give thanks in everything in 1 Tim 5:18? Paul is not teaching that we should thank God for everything that happens to us, but in everything. Evil doesn't

come from God but when evil strikes , we can still be thankful for God's presence and for the good that he will accomplish through the distress.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-10 It brings us great joy to see another person coming to faith in Christ and mature in that faith. Paul experienced this joy many times. He thanks God for those who had come to know Christ and for their strong faith. He also prays for their continued growth.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 How can you show respect to and hold in the highest regard your pastor and other church leaders? Express your appreciation, tell them how you have been helped by their leadership and teaching and thank them for their ministry in your life.