
Can a Christian Be Unconverted?

How do you know that you are a Christian? Is there a minimum requirement one must meet to be legitimately called a Christian? The Bible warns against false doctrine by which many will be deceived. How can one identify false doctrine so as not to be deceived?

Consider for example the person who acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, faithfully attends church every Sunday, has never indulged in adultery, and shows love to everyone? Would you consider this person to be a Christian?

Worshipping Christ Is Not Enough

Most would regard this person as a Christian because he accepts and worships Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Yet, the shocking news from the Bible is that simply acknowledging and directing your worship to Jesus Christ does not make you a Christian! Jesus makes this plain in Mark 7:7-8: "*And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.* For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men."

Christ does not accept worship, no matter how sincere the worshiper may be, if such worship does not conform to God's commandments. If our worship does not conform to God's commandments, it is *man-made!* Man-made traditions are worship practices that are not authorized by God. For example, the celebration of Christmas, Easter, and Sunday as Christian days of worship does not originate in the Bible. These worship practices are man-made traditions and unacceptable to God. Worship is only accepted by God if that worship conforms to His commandments. Hence, Jesus warns, "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" (Matthew 7:21).

Many believe there are no works to salvation, and that one only has to believe on the Lord Jesus to be saved. But Jesus dismisses this view when he asks, "But why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Even the demons believe and shudder (James 2:19), but that

does not make them Christians.

It is therefore important for every serious seeker after God to know what is true and what is false Christianity. The apostle John admonishes us, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). How do we test the spirits? Some believe that the Spirit of God is evidenced by the working of miracles. Others look at the success of evangelistic meetings as evidence that God is working with a particular ministry, while others judge by the integrity, dedication, and sincerity of the preacher. But are these good enough grounds for testing the spirits?

Miracles Not Enough

Of course, we do serve a miracle-working God, but the Bible also makes it clear that signs and wonders are not evidence of God's Spirit at work. The apostles Paul and John speak of *counterfeit* miracles in the last days carried out by lawless men (those who do not observe God's laws).

"The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).

"He [the man of lawlessness] performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived" (Revelation 13:13-14).

Notice that powerful miracle working in the last days will deceive the vast majority of human beings. These are miracles that actually happen; people are actually healed. But the Bible identifies them as counterfeit because the Spirit of God does not perform them, much the way Pharaoh's miracle of turning his rod into a snake was not performed by the Spirit of God. This is why God wants us to test the spirits. The spirit world is powerful, and as

human beings we can be carried away by the work of evil spirits, believing it to be the work of God.

Imagine, for example, your mother being laid up in a wheelchair for over twenty years and a healing crusade comes to your town. Your love for your mother and your desire to see her healed is enough to motivate you to take her for healing. What a joy it is to see her spring from her chair, jumping for joy and thanking Jesus. How can anyone convince you that this was not the work of the Holy Spirit, since you have been praying about this matter for years? Why would you want to listen to anyone who tells you that this was not the work of Jesus Christ when you personally experienced this powerful miracle for yourself? That is exactly what Jesus warned about when He told His disciples that "false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Mark 13:22).

People are deceived because they are carried away by their sensibilities and refuse to examine the truth of the Bible against the beliefs and practices of those who purport to represent Christ. So rather than demonstrating the power of the Spirit of God, the vast majority of miracle working in the last days is associated with the works of Satan.

Large Congregations Not Enough

Many watch their television screens and are thrilled by the large crowds filling up arenas and stadiums with people streaming to the altar with flowing tears to give their life to Christ. Television evangelists provide this as evidence of the mighty hand of God at work and a good reason for their audiences to support their work. No one should question the sincerity, commitment, passion, and good intentions of these evangelists, but it is important to examine whether large congregations and crowds are evidence of the Spirit of God at work.

The Bible identifies large crowds with those who are being deceived, not with those finding the truth. Jesus described His church as a "little flock." "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). One may argue that the church was a little flock at the time Jesus established it, but the idea was for it to become a large flock. Jesus, however, speaks of the *continued* small size of this flock when he says, "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:14). So the people of God are not identified by large churches overflowing with crowds. But neither must one take this to mean that because a congregation is small it belongs to God. The point here is that one should not be swayed by large

crowds, believing that this is evidence of God's work. In fact, the Bible associates the work of Satan with large crowds toward the end of the age. "He [the "beast" from the land] performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast..." (Revelation 13:13-14).

The Bible teaches that the vast majority of humanity will only come to the truth and to know Jesus Christ during the Millennium after Christ returns. At this time, Satan will be locked away so he can deceive the nations no more and will be let loose again for a short time at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 20:1-5).

How, Then, Can One Distinguish True From False Christianity?

How does one distinguish true from false Christianity? How do we know who are God's true ministers? Jesus tells us how. In Luke 6:46, He says, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" And in Matthew 24:11-12, He says, "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold." Jesus identified lawlessness as the key element in the message of the false teachers. *Disregard for God's law* is the foundation of counterfeit Christianity! False prophets verbally acknowledge Jesus as "Lord" while refusing to obey His laws (Luke 6:46). Jesus Himself warned us in Matthew 7:15, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." Teachers of lawlessness appear as innocent sheep, men of integrity, sincere and dedicated, performing devoutly religious acts, but they do not belong to Christ. They will come in power and might, but watch out for the key element of deception, which is lawlessness: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:22-23).

So, How Do You Know if You Are a Christian?

To be a Christian, one must have the Spirit of God. The apostle Paul tells us, "Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His" (Romans 8:9). But how do you know if you have the Spirit of Christ? The apostle Peter tells us, "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" (Acts 2:38). One must repent of *sin* to be a Christian. One cannot repent of sin if one does not know what sin is. After repentance one must stop living in sin, and to do so one must be aware of what sin is. This leads us to the next question: "What is sin?" First John 3:4 tells us what sin is: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." One must cease to break the laws of God to be a Christian. If one lives a lifestyle of breaking God's laws, that person is constantly living a life of sin and does not have the Spirit of God. Why? Because God gives His Spirit to "those who obey him" (Acts 5:32). You may ask, "Obey what?" What is it we are called upon to obey so that we may receive the Spirit of God? Jesus answered this question when the rich young ruler asked him how to enter into life: "But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "You shall not murder," "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "Honor your father and your mother," and, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 19:17-19).

You may say that Jesus did not mention the weekly or annual Sabbaths so they are not part of the commandments He expects us to keep. But think about it. The Sabbath is not the only commandment Jesus omitted. Jesus did not mention several others which you will agree should be kept by all Christians. For example, He did not mention the First, Second, and Third Commandments, which are: "You shall have no other gods before Me"; "You shall not make for yourself a carved image...you shall not bow down to them nor serve them"; "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain" (Exodus 20:3-7). Does the fact that Jesus did not mention these three commandments mean they are not to be kept? Obviously not. So why would the Fourth Commandment ("Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"—verse 8) be excluded? It doesn't make sense to drop one and not the others. The fact is, Jesus' purpose was not to list the Ten Commandments but to list those which the rich young ruler was violating.

The apostle James makes it clear that all the commandments must be kept when he says, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law" (James 2:10-11). This clearly means that one who refuses to observe God's Sabbaths continues trans-

gressing His laws and living in a state of sin.

But, you may say, nobody keeps the law perfectly, so we are all lawbreakers. Even those who seek to keep the laws of God break them from time to time. What is the difference? The difference is, those who refuse to obey God's law, including His Sabbaths, are sinning wilfully, while those who seek to keep His laws are not. King David states it this way: "Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression" (Psalm 19:13). The writer to the book of Hebrews warns, "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:26).

We cannot, of ourselves, keep the law perfectly. One is justified not by the law but by Christ. The Bible, however, tells us that Christ justifies only those who obey His laws. "[F]or not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified" (Romans 2:13).

Why God Sent His Spirit

To know whether we have the Spirit of God, it is important to understand why God gives us His Spirit. Let's go back to the Old Testament to find out. In Deuteronomy 5:29, God lamented the failure of His people to keep His laws. "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever" (Deuteronomy 5:29). This was the issue. God saw the need for a transformation of the heart that would enable His people to keep His laws. God later announced through the prophet Ezekiel how He would do this: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you [*Why?*] and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

It is this plan of action to incline the heart of man to keep His laws that God formulated into a covenant what would come to be known as the New Covenant. Many persons claim to be New Covenant Christians without understanding the purpose of the New Covenant or why it came into existence in the first place. This has led many to believe that the New Covenant came into being to abolish God's law, when the very opposite is true. The purpose of the New Covenant is to *enable believers to keep the laws of God*. Here is how God announced the New Covenant in the Old Testament:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD,

when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jeremiah 31:31–33; see also Hebrews 8:8).

The law is no longer engraved on tablets of stone but rather on the tablets of the heart by the Spirit. Without the Spirit of God we cannot obey Him. We need the Spirit of God because “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:7–8).

Conclusion

Because we live in a Sabbath-breaking culture, ignoring the Sabbath does not strike us as sinful. Much the way people who live in a society where a man is permitted to marry many wives would not see him as sinning, or much the way some churches do not have a difficulty hiring homosexual priests because it is fast becoming a norm in our society. Most people get their religion from their culture. But true Christians cannot use their culture to determine how God is to be worshipped.

Many believe that they can be true Christians and live a lifestyle of Sabbath-breaking. Yet these same persons would not agree that they can be true Christians and live a lifestyle of adultery. On what basis do people conclude that the Fourth

Commandment, which deals with the Sabbath, is less important than the Seventh Commandment, which deals with adultery? Where in the Bible can one find support for this claim? Jesus said, “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19).

It is not hard after all to distinguish between true and false Christianity. Lawlessness is the identifying mark of counterfeit Christianity. This is the point the apostle John impresses on us in 1 John 2:3–6:

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

How did Jesus walk? Jesus Himself tells us in John 15:10, “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.” Yes, “if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17). It is no wonder that in the very last chapter of the last book of the Bible Jesus revealed these words to the apostle John as a kind of last reminder: “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14–15).



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