

Understanding Christianity

A problem that many Christians face is an inability to state their faith in a manner that is clear, understandable, and free from Christian jargon. What follows is an attempt to define key Christian terms in language understandable to those outside church circles.

The word Christian came into being in the first century A.D., identifying those who were living in covenant with God through Jesus Christ. A covenant is like a contract made between two parties in a business. One party initiates the covenant with the benefits and responsibilities. The other party agrees to do their part in obedience to the words both spoken and written in the form of a legal document. God initiates covenant with man. Man responds by obedience to the words of the covenant.

SCRIPTURES – messages sent from God to man through His chosen spokesmen. Those who passed the rigorous tests for qualification as God’s messengers (tests set forth in the writings of Moses) wrote only what was communicated to them by God. All Scripture is inspired by God (i.e., God-breathed) and is useful for teaching, convicting, correcting, and practical training in *righteousness*; righteousness may be defined as submission to and conformity to the moral standards and purposes of God.

By inspiration, we do not mean that God used the individual writers as automata, or that He dictated to them what they should say, but we mean that His Holy Spirit so guided and controlled the writers that what they wrote was true and was the particular truth God wanted to be given in writing to His people. God allowed the writers to use their own intellects, their own language, and their own style. However, when they wrote, His Holy Spirit supernaturally kept their writing free from error and rendered it the exact truth which God wanted conveyed to His people down through the ages. The Bible thus becomes a unit, parts of which cannot be cut off without irreparable injury to the whole.

GOD – a pure, infinite spirit in whom all things have their beginning, consist, and will have their end. He is the Creator of all peoples and things that we know in the physical realm. Because God is spirit, we can only know Him by the faith that He gives us. “*By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible*” (Hebrews 11:3).

TRINITY – the three personal forms of the one true God: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. Though they are one, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit experience personal relationship with one another. The three are equal with each other. Though each fulfills certain distinct roles with respect to mankind, they are one and the same in thought, action, character, power, position, authority, and purpose. God and only God is eternal, infinite, all-powerful, everywhere-present, all-knowing, unchanging, holy, just, good, loving, patient, faithful, sovereign, and truthful.

GOD THE FATHER – the spiritual father who has a relationship with man that is predominantly one of loving him and giving him “grace” (undeserved blessings, including the desire and power to do God’s will). He gave His only son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of the world and raised Him bodily from the dead.

GOD THE SON – namely Jesus Christ, who possesses an eternal, glorious, and indestructible body. He is the physical demonstration of what God is like. His predominant role with respect to man is to bridge the gap between man and God in the only way possible – by paying the ransom that only He could pay (because He, alone, lived a sinless life on earth) for man’s sin of rebellion against God. He is the creator of the universe, of all angels, of all men, of all power, and of all authority. At His incarnation He humbly took the position of a bond-slave and the form of a human being while retaining the attributes of God. He was both man and God, and as such, by laying down His life and shedding His blood on the cross of Calvary, could pay the ransom for every man’s sinfulness. Therefore, the Father has exalted Him, giving all judgment and authority unto the Son.

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT – a spirit sent from God the Father through the Son to convict man of sin and his need for a savior, to testify of Jesus Christ as that savior, and to urge man to reconcile with God by receiving Christ as Lord. He is revealed in Scripture as the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Father, and the Helper (encourager, comforter, one called along side to help). Holy Spirit comes to dwell in those who have received Christ as Lord. To them He reveals truth and gives understanding of scriptures, assurance, hope, comfort, power to minister, and power to grow more and more like Jesus in character.

VIRGIN BIRTH – the way Jesus came to the earth. Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, Mary, whose fiancé (later husband) was Joseph. Mary was especially blessed among women, for Jesus was conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit; however, Mary was not sinless by nature. Only Jesus among mankind lives up to that claim. Mary did not remain a virgin. She had four sons by Joseph, plus an unspecified number of daughters.

MAN – a being created in the image of God, i.e., possessing body, soul (mind, will, and emotions), and spirit, whose existence continues beyond the grave, beyond physical death, into eternity. Man is born a sinner. By identifying with Jesus Christ, man can live free from the power of sin. The possibility of sinning will remain in this age. The probability of not sinning increases with our maturity in Christ.

MAN’S RESPONSIBILITY – the individual’s part in his/her relationship with God. Every person must respond to God’s revelation of Himself in the creation and in the person of Jesus Christ. Men who humble themselves before God and submit their lives to the control of Jesus Christ (i.e., become Christians) will possess a quality of life described in the Scripture as “eternal life” (also translated “everlasting life”). These people are given the opportunity to “reign in life through...Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17). They will also serve in the life to come as rulers and judges over angels and kingdoms. Men who refuse to honor God as God and reject Christ, refusing to give Him His rightful place as the boss of their lives, will spend eternity separated from God, choosing to suffer horribly without respite in hell rather than to submit to Jesus’ authority. Christians alive

on earth are God's "ambassadors" to their fellow men, calling those around them to accept God's offer of reconciliation (i.e., submission to Christ). They are in training for their leadership positions in God's kingdom both in this age and in the age to come. All that is Christ's will also be theirs as they mature in Him. In fact, they are "co-seated" with Christ (sharing His honor, glory, power, and authority) at the right hand of God the Father in the heavenly/spiritual realm.

SIN AND SINS – sin (singular form) is often referred to as "the sin nature". It is rebellion against God – challenging the right of God to rule as God, i.e., allowing life to revolve around self or around *anything* other than God. The Scripture states that because of the first man's (Adam's) sin, all peoples are born with a sin nature. Sin ultimately results in "condemnation," eternal separation from God. Sins (plural form) are acts that go against God's laws and are the natural responses of the sin nature.

SALVATION – a free gift from God received not on the basis of merit, but through putting total trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – accepting His payment for all sins and accepting Him as the supreme boss. It is a gift that delivers the recipient from the guilt and the penalty of sin, as well as from enslavement by the sin nature. Salvation leads the believer day by day to greater and greater conformity to the character of Christ (a process sometimes called "sanctification") and contains the promise of a lifestyle of "righteousness, peace, and joy" in the Kingdom of God.

REDEMPTION – Christ's payment of mankind's penalty for sin by the shedding of His blood on the cross. This blood, innocent because Christ committed no sin, delivers the believer in Christ from the guilt and penalty of sin. Trusting in this payment as the *only* possible price for sin initiates the operation of the Holy Spirit's power to deliver the believer from enslavement by sin, from habitually acting in rebellion against God to habitually acting in obedience to God.

REGENERATION – a word for the new life, the "rebirth," experienced by a person who puts his faith and trust in the crucified and resurrected Christ, a process by which the believer comes to share in the divine nature and eternal life of Christ Himself. This happens when the Holy Spirit comes to enter the heart of a person who has surrendered his/her life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. A synonym in Scripture for regeneration is being "born again."

RESURRECTION – the rising of the dead to life. The Bible speaks of a time when Jesus Christ will return. Those who have died trusting in the life of Jesus Christ as their personal salvation will receive an immortal, spiritual body. Believers who are living at Christ's return will also receive an immortal, spiritual body. The life developed in this age will be united with the spiritual body in the age to come.

ATONEMENT – a substitutionary payment whereby an innocent party pays the penalty for a guilty person's offense. In sacrificing His life, in shedding His blood, Christ bore the sentence justly decreed for man's violation of God's law, namely death. Christ alone, as the only sinless man, could atone for the sins of humanity.

JUDGMENTS OF GOD – God’s justice system. The Bible speaks of many judgments of God in relation to His plan of creation and redemption. God’s Holy Spirit is continuously convicting of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. This leads us to repent for offending God and people when we sin in order that our fellowship with God and people can be without sin. When Jesus Christ returns, non-believers will be judged. Believers will be judged for their service and rewarded to reign in the age to come.

SATAN – an angelic being created by Jesus Christ and appointed to a position of great authority, but who rebelled against God and introduced sin into the universe through pride, through his desire to exalt himself to a position of equality with God. Through his deception of Eve, Satan secured the downfall of Adam and, through him, the downfall of the entire human race. He is also head of a vast host of demons, or fallen angels. Satan possesses enormous power, but in all things he is subject to the authority of Jesus Christ and believers in union with Christ. Satan’s desire to receive the worship that rightfully belongs to God alone is so extreme as to cause him to oppose God’s work and God’s purpose at every opportunity.

HEAVEN – the spiritual realm in which God is fully manifested, in which God rules, and in which God abundantly communes with and rewards His followers. It is the realm in which those in spiritual union with Christ now live.

HELL – the realm to which are consigned those beings who rebel against God by disregarding or ignoring His authority. Hell is a place of destruction and separation from a loving, holy, righteous God.

BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT – rebellion against the only Person (Holy Spirit) who can lead us to the reality of the forgiveness of our sins and our personal salvation. Our rebellion makes the Holy Spirit become our enemy. Submitting to the Holy Spirit’s leading guides us unto eternal life.

FAITH – a gift from God, who initiates covenant with mankind through Jesus Christ. Faith is acted out in obedience to God’s moral laws. All faith has a direction. Faith in God is a belief or trust in God that He exists and is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. God puts the faith in man’s heart to receive Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior, beginning a new life in Him.

Controversial Doctrines

The following doctrines have generated considerable controversy in Christian circles. However, the Bible is quite specific on these points. The resolution of these doctrinal paradoxes comes by 1) integrating *all* parts of the Word of God toward a self-consistent conclusion, 2) interpreting narrative scriptures in the light of didactic (instructive or explanatory) scriptures, and 3) recognizing that God’s frame of reference includes and transcends man’s space-time dimensions and limitations.

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT – the issue regarding how the Spirit is involved in our salvation experience and is the indwelling presence for empowering for ministry. The controversy has evolved because of terminology. Scripture speaks of the “baptism with the Holy Spirit” as well as the “gift of the Holy Spirit,” the “Spirit who dwells in you,” and being “filled with the Spirit.”

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – supernatural gifts (e.g., miracles, healings, tongues, prophecies, discerning of spirits) bestowed upon believers in Christ whenever needed to assist them in their ministries for the Lord Jesus Christ. These gifts have been with the Church continuously throughout this age and will remain with the Church into the age to come. Satan has the power to counterfeit the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the existence of manifestations, alone, is not sufficient evidence for the working of the Spirit of God.

PREDESTINATION VS. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY – Scripture teaches that God has foreordained or predestined everything in His plan of creation and redemption. In His omniscience, He has a plan and purpose for everything. God is also omnipotent, omnipresent, and immutable. He rules with divine wisdom and love. God is the primary cause of everything. The Holy Spirit harmonizes all the paradoxes in God’s written revelation to us. There are no contradictions. The will of God and man flow in perfect harmony. God is in control, and the individual is responsible for his/her choices.

ETERNAL SECURITY – very poor terminology that has evolved in American cultural Christianity as well as in other cultures of the world meaning “once saved always saved.” The true meaning revealed in Scripture teaches that God imparts eternal life by the sovereign election of His mercy and grace. This is the God-kind of life. We are branches of the Vine (Jesus). The Spirit through the Word makes the believer secure as he/she comes under the lordship of God’s Word. Deity is linked to humanity through their union with Christ or humanity is linked to deity through their union with Christ. The indwelling presence of God’s Spirit makes this a reality in our experience.

How To Become A Born-Again Christian

BELIEVE that is, be *convinced*, that Jesus is God come in the form of man, that Jesus paid the price for your sin by shedding His blood on the cross, and that God raised Him bodily from the dead.

REPENT of your sin of rebellion against God, your refusal to give Jesus Christ his rightful place as the controller of your life. In other words, admit to God that you have been running your own life, agree with Him that this is wrong, and tell Him you now wish to relinquish the control to Him.

- ASK** Jesus Christ to take complete control of your life.
- ACCEPT** His pardon for all your sin – past, present, and future – and His gift of eternal life with Him.
- SUBMIT** your will to the will of Jesus in and for your life, committing yourself to obey His commands and to let go of any bitternesses against those who have hurt you.
- TRUST** Jesus to give you all the power you will need to obey Him.
- CONFESS** with your mouth that Jesus Christ is in charge of your life and is your personal Savior.

“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” (Romans 10:8-10)

Marks of a Born-Again Believer

A person who truly has been born again will manifest to some degree at least a few of the following signs that scriptures say will accompany those who believe. For the one who has just given his life to Christ’s control, some of these qualities may simply be latent; however, in time, with the nurturing and encouragement of the Holy Spirit within him/her, they will be evidenced to a greater and greater degree.

- 1) Desire to read scriptures.
- 2) Discovery that scriptures now come alive when they are read.
- 3) Desire for communication with God through prayer.
- 4) Absolute assurance that Jesus Christ is the only way to God, the only truth about God, and the only source of eternal life in fellowship with God.
- 5) Heightened conscience; greater sensitivity to right and wrong.
- 6) Pressure from non-Christian friends.
- 7) New strength to withstand temptation.
- 8) Desire for a Christ-like life.

- 9) Desire and courage to witness.
- 10) Genuine love for and a desire for fellowship with other believers.
- 11) Powerful new dimension of love – Christ’s love.
- 12) Blessed hope – because of our union with Christ in God.

How to be Filled with the Holy Spirit

Though all born-again believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they are not always filled (directed and empowered) by the Holy Spirit. This filling is renewed when one practices the following:

CONFESS I John 1:9 – *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

SUBMIT Romans 6:11-13 – *Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

RECEIVE Luke 11:13 – *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*

BELIEVE I John 5:14-15 – *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*

THANK GOD 1Thessalonians 5:18 – *Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

How To Get Rid Of Bitterness

Medical science and social sciences such as psychology and psychiatry believe that bitterness (a feeling of resentment) will injure you both psychologically and physically. These are relationship problems. The root of such problems is spiritual.

According to Ephesians 4:30-32, we grieve the Holy Spirit when we permit bitterness and anger to settle into our being. Verse 31 designates the consequences of allowing bitterness to take root in our lives. Bitterness, if not healed, will lead to wrath (an inward seething or boiling up that may subside, but only to break out again). Wrath, if not healed, leads to anger (an outburst or visible indignation or irritation). Anger, if not healed, leads to slander (verbal defamation of character). In turn, slander, if not dealt with, will lead to malice (physical violence resulting in injurious harm). Sometimes this malice is directed inward, resulting in deep depression and an attempt at suicide.

The root cause of all manifestations of anger is bitterness. It is necessary, therefore, that we discern the object of bitterness. Verse 32 describes an important process, one that helps open the way to being filled with the Holy Spirit. It indicates, step by step, how to forgive the one towards whom the bitterness is aimed. The first step is to develop kindness (consideration resulting from a sensitivity towards needs, an ability to look beyond people's faults in order to see the unmet needs that give rise to the faults). Having developed kindness, one may take the next step, which is to become tenderhearted (compassionate, with heartfelt tenderness that enables one to become actively involved in meeting the needs of others). Out of a tenderhearted spirit will flow, from God, the power to forgive (to release resentment by graciously putting away the right to take vengeance or even to hold a grudge)

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

SCRIPTURES

Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:15-22

Romans 15:4

II Timothy 3:15-17

II Peter 1:19-21

GOD

John 4:24

Genesis 1:1-31

Hebrews 1:3; 11:3

TRINITY

Deuteronomy 6:4

John 14:10, 16-17, 20, 23

Ephesians 4:4-5

GOD THE FATHER

John 5:17-19; 20:17

Matthew 6:9

GOD THE SON

Colossians 1:15-19

I Timothy 2:5-6

Matthew 3:17; 27:54

John 8:28; 5:26-27

Philippians 2:5-11

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

John 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13

VIRGIN BIRTH

Isaiah 7:14

Matthew 1:23

Luke 1:34-37

MAN

Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-2

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

John 3:16-18

Micah 6:8

Acts 17:30-32

Romans 2:16

II Corinthians 5:10

SIN & SINS

Romans 5:12, 14, 17; 6:6-7

I Corinthians 15:22

Romans 3:23

Ezekiel 18:4, 20

I John 1:7-9

SALVATION

John 4:22

Romans 10:9-10

Ephesians 2:8-9

REDEMPTION

Galatians 3:13

I Corinthians 1:30

Titus 2:14

Ephesians 1:7

REGENERATION

John 3:3-6

Titus 3:5

II Peter 1:3-4

RESURRECTION

Acts 17:30-32

I Corinthians 15:11-44

Philippians 3:20-21

ATONEMENT

Leviticus 16:11,14-19;17:11

I Corinthians 5:7

I Peter 1:18-20

JUDGMENTS OF GOD

Genesis 6:5-7; 8:21; 18:25

John 5:26-27

John 16:7-11

II Corinthians 5:10

Hebrews 9:27

SATAN

Colossians 1:16; 2:15

Genesis 3:1

Isaiah 14:12-14

Ezekiel 28:13-15

Job 1:7

I John 3:8

HEAVEN

Genesis 1:1

Psalms 115:16

Matthew 3:16

Ephesians 2:6

Hebrews 12:22-23

Revelation 21:10

Philippians 3:20

HELL

Matthew 10:28; 25:41

Revelation 20:10

II Peter 2:4

BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

Matthew 12:31-32

Isaiah 63:10

Titus 3:5

John 16:7-11

FAITH

Ephesians 2:8-9

Hebrews 11:1-6

Mark 11:22-24

CONTROVERSIAL DOCTRINES

BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Matthew 3:16

Luke 3:16

John 1:33

Acts 10:38

SPIRIT WHO DWELLS IN YOU

John 14:17

Romans 8:9, 11

FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 2:4, 31

Ephesians 5:18

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 2:38-39

Luke 11:13

RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 19:2, 6

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

I Corinthians 12-14

Hebrews 2:4

Acts 19:6, 11; 3:1-6

PREDESTINATION VS PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Isaiah 46:9-11

Psalms 139

Acts 2:23; 4:27-28

Ephesians 1:1-6, 10, 11

I Peter 1:20

Romans 8:28-29

John 15:16

Joshua 24:15

Isaiah 45:21-22

I Samuel 8:7

II Corinthians 5:18-21

Galatians 6:7-8

Hebrews 3:7-19; 6:1-6; 10:26-39

ETERNAL SECURITY

John 6:37, 44-47

John 15:1-7, 16

I Corinthians 6:17

John 14:20

John 17:9, 10, 20-22

Romans 6:5-11

Ephesians 1:17-23; 2:4-6

I John 4:17

I John 5:10-13

I Peter 1:3-5