

# Are You A Christian?

By: Jim Hohnberger

Why of course I am! Why do you ask such a thing? Your question even irritates me! Don't you know I go to church, pay my tithes and offerings, believe in Christ, believe in the tenets of the church, have a clean lifestyle, and basically try to be a good person? I even do some witnessing and hand out some literature. Besides I belong to the right denomination. Certainly I'm a Christian! You are not going to make me question my Christianity are you?

If you'd have been a member of the Jewish church in Christ's day you would probably have believed you were a Jew and thereby in good standing with God. Why, because you were a member of the right church, God's church, paid a faithful tithe and offering, went to the temple on Sabbath, refrained from unclean meats and followed the ordinances of the church and looked for the coming of the Messiah. Thus feeling quite confident of your standing with God.

But when the Messiah came friends, only a handful recognized Him, only a handful followed Him, only a handful found their salvation "in Him."

The vast majority of Jews were not real Jews. In fact scripture validates this. "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly: But he is a Jew, which is one **inwardly**." (Romans 2:28,29) It is apparent not only from scripture but history also that most of the Jews were Jews only outwardly. In other words they followed a form, a routine, a ritual, they went to the right church and believed in the Bible.

These "professed" Jews were the very ones that crucified Christ Himself! Hung Him on the cross and denied Him. It wasn't just the church leadership but also most of its members that in the end were only Jews outwardly.

Romans 9:6 puts it this way, "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." In other words they are not all Jews (Christians) that profess to be Jews (Christians). In fact scripture clearly indicates that though their numbers "be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved." (Romans 9:27)

So are you going to be part of the Remnant? Are you going to be a Christian outwardly or **inwardly**? Don't rely on your church membership because it

won't save you. Don't rely on your mental assent to certain truths, they won't save you. Don't rely on your lifestyle changes nor your donations, they won't save you either! Salvation is found "**in Christ**" only!

In the day of final reckoning there is going to be a lot of "weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Luke 13:28) For millions of "Christians" have been led to trust, **in** their church, **in** their creeds, **in** their leaders, **in** their lifestyle but have not been led "**into Christ**."

Only those found "in Christ" will in the end be saved and found to be true Christians versus professed Christians. Let's validate this first with Scripture then define what it means to be in Christ.

Let's start with I John 5:11,12. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is **in His Son**." Could it be any plainer, any clearer? Even I can understand and see it. Eternal life is "**in His Son**." Not in the church, in a doctrine or in a lifestyle but "in His Son." Verse 12 now expounds upon it, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

We must have Jesus, we must be "in Christ" for in Him only is eternal life. But what does it mean to be **in Christ**?

Well its the opposite of out. When Lucifer stepped "out" of Christ, he decided his way was better than God's way. He lost eternal life because he chose to disconnect himself from the source of life. He chose to follow his will and way instead of God's will and way. Who's will and way are you choosing, your's or Christ's?

When Adam chose to step "out" of the will of Christ, he became fallen and selfish. He began to die, to age, to loose his life. He too wanted it his way instead of God's way. Which way is it with you? God's or your own?

So then the word "in" is very important. In fact it is the apostle Paul's favorite expression occurring in his epistles more than 70 times. Six of his epistles are addressed to the saints and faithful who are "**in Christ**."

Are you "in Christ?" or merely in the church, in the truth, into reforms, into outreach, into end time events? These without the former can be a

curse. Why? Because they become a substitute, a counterfeit, a cover up for the real, the genuine. They have a subtle way of convincing us that we are the "enlightened ones," when in essence we may be the "foolish ones." Are you a wise or a foolish virgin? The only difference was that the wise virgins possessed the oil, which represents the Holy Spirit. The wise virgins **lived under the influence** of the Holy Spirit. Day by day, hour-by-hour, moment-by-moment they surrendered to do the will of God. They were "**in Christ**" by faith, by a faith that worked and cooperated with God in all things in the present not the future. There is a big difference.

No one is safe unless they are "in Christ," in the present, in the now, experientially. Theoretically we are to assent to what is true, but experientially we are to be doers not hearers only. All of humanity was constituted in Christ on the cross, all of humanity was in Him. What He did, he did for all of us. But that's only half of the "in Christ" equation. Christ also invites us, by His preemptive grace, to surrender ourselves; mind, body, soul and will to His Lordship over our lives

in the present. Because what He has done for us and what He is doing in us are to be **inseparably one**. You cannot have one without the other. Christ cannot be divided, you are complete in Him not apart from Him. If you accept His substitutionary role for your sins you must also accept His role as Lord of your life.

It was the fact that Lucifer and Adam wouldn't allow Him to be their Lord that got us all in this mess of sin today. Adam repented and allowed Christ to regain His position of Lordship over him. Lucifer still resists coming under Christ's control and is now Satan, the leader of the foul revolt. Who are you following: Adam or Lucifer?

Millions of Christians have accepted His substitutionary role but are resisting allowing Him to be Lord of their entire life, particularly in the now. Until they do, they are not "in Christ." You see "in" denotes you are presently in, right now it is happening, you are cooperating with Him in the present, in all your known choices. No resistance, no rebellion, just a conscious, "Yes, Lord."

For example, it may be -40 F below zero outside. You may know that in Christ's house it is a

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pleasant 80 degrees F. But if you're out in the cold, you receive no real benefit; you're still outside. Knowing about the 80 degrees in Christ does not warm you. Talking about it does you no saving good. Telling others about it does you little practical good. The fact that Christ's house is paid for and you have a title to it in your safe deposit box, still brings you no present benefit unless you choose to get into Christ. As long as you remain "in Christ" you receive all the benefits of His protection, warmth and security. They are yours, they are free, but you have to choose to enter in and remain in. You can at any time step outside, but if you do, you lose all the benefits of its warmth, security and protection.

That's what Paul meant when he said in Colossians 2:10, "Ye are **complete in Him**." Not in a knowledge or profession of Him, but abiding "in Him." In an article in *Signs of the Times* July 4, 1892 a well-known author put it this way, "We are complete **in Him**, accepted in the Beloved only as we abide in Him by faith." Also we find in the book of Acts 17:28, "For in Him, we live and move, and have our being."

Isaiah also understood when he declared, "**In** the Lord have I righteousness and strength." and "**In** the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified." (Isaiah 45:24,25) May I also quote just a couple more passages so as to remove all lingering doubt? "Therefore, if any man be **in Christ**, he is a new creature." (II Corinthians 5:17) It doesn't say if you are in the church or in the truth, or into the doctrine of salvation, or into a good lifestyle, it says we must be "in Christ," not just legally but experientially. It is a here and now experience of letting Christ have all of me, that I may have all of Him.

Hopefully one more text will help cement in our hearts and minds what constitutes salvation and consequently a true living Christian. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are **in Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:1) Who are they? Can "them" be an Adventist? Yes! Can "them" be a Baptist? Yes! Can "them" be a Catholic? Yes! You mean to say there's going to be Catholics, Baptists as well as Adventists in heaven? Yes, if

they meet the condition, which is not walking in the flesh but in the Spirit by a living faith experience in Christ Jesus.

You say, "I hear you Jim, but will you spell out practically not theologically, how I am to be found in Christ daily, hourly? I'm glad you asked, because conversion and righteousness are not received or retained apart from being "in Christ" and continuing to abide in Christ. For no man is in a **saving relationship** any longer than he abides in Christ and exercises a living faith in Him.

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Being a Christian is not a one time choice but rather a minute by minute, continuous choice to let God have all of me. Day in and day out I am to live for Jesus. My focus is to be in His will, His way. Many attempt to accomplish this through their own humanity. They set out with their strong will power and their teeth gritted in determination to live the Christian life. It always ends in defeat.

How then is it possible to live everyday, every hour, every moment to the glory of God? It's very simple. We are to live as Jesus did. Every morning

Jesus took time with God. We too, must take time to give ourselves to God every morning, to surrender at the beginning of every day. It can't be a rushed thing, but has to allow time for us to commune with God and really listen to what He's saying to us individually. God speaks to us through the Bible, nature, providence and the impressions in the mind. Then after communing with our Father, and making sure there is nothing to prevent us from hearing his voice, we can rest assured that He will guide us.

When we leave our place of quiet devotion, it is essential to take God with us in order to commune with Him throughout the day. We need to learn to ask, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6 God wants us to know we are not in this alone. We need help from a source outside of ourselves at the beginning of the day and then all through the day. As we learn to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's prompting upon our hearts and learn to submit our wills to always do His will, then it is that, "... Christ liveth in me." Galatians 2:20

But then temptation comes, perhaps the very

same temptation where we have often failed before. In the past we have gritted our teeth and tried to resist the temptation until, we either failed or forced ourselves to obey. There is no peace or joy in such an experience. Friends, the true conflict of temptation occurs in the heart. I first must decide if I want to remain surrendered to God. When surrender is my choice, then self dies and the victory is won and then God supplies all the power to meet the temptation. This experience is hard because self, my way and will must die; but it is the only path to peace and joy as a Christian! I must choose to remain **in** Christ, daily, hourly.

Now choice doesn't merit me anything with God. I am not saved by my choices. The very desire to make the choice of submission to God is a gift from His grace. Salvation is fully the gift of God, yet it is that choice to submit which allows God the freedom to transform our lives through the ministry of His grace upon the human heart.

It is vitally important to see this, for most who have taken the name of Christ live a strange amalgamation of Christ and self-contending for the management of the life. This type of Christian life is like a yo-yo, continuously up and down. Being born of the Spirit is going from this experience to allowing Christ to be sole ruler of the life. When this amalgamation ends, there is rest for the soul. Then we learn the true science of salvation and the language of heaven, which is simply how to allow Christ full access to all my decisions and then by His grace, through a living faith, to say yes to God and no to self.

It all has to do with faith, a living faith, a faith that works by love and purifies the soul; where we are enabled to live above the pull of the flesh in the present. Faith is not only a belief in what Christ has done for me but also a surrender of all my known choices to Him, where all my thoughts, feelings and actions are in accordance to His known will, where I choose by His preeminent grace to depend only **in** Him. This is a **faith that works!**

Are all your known choices surrendered to Him? Do you trust only in His merits for your standing before God? Do you depend in His power to choose right over wrong? If you do then you are a Christian. If this is a continuous choice, a continuous acceptance, a continuous dependence, then you are continuing to be a Christian. Welcome to the body of Christ!

Just a final note. Someone might think that I am anti-church or anti-doctrine or anti-lifestyle because I de-emphasize these things. This is not so! I believe in the church but not as the solution only as a tool. I love the truth but only as a means - not an end. My lifestyle changes have given me better health and a greater awareness of His presence but I'm not made righteous by carrots and bananas. All these are good only as they direct us to **Christ**. They are the dock that leads us onto the ship; which is Christ. Let's not just be excited about being on the dock, let's get aboard the Ship which is Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour!

P.S. The ship is sailing soon!

## Power For Living



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Empowered Living Ministries

3945 North Fork Rd, Columbia Falls, MT 59912

Office: (406) 387-4333 Fax: (406) 387-4336

Toll free (877) 755-8300 (orders only)

Email: [office@empoweredlivingministries.org](mailto:office@empoweredlivingministries.org)

Web: [www.EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org](http://www.EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org)