

Which Am I – A Church Member or A Christian

Text : Matthew 7: 13-23

INTRODUCTION :

A. What is the difference between a church member and a Christian ?

1. Some assume these to be synonymous terms.
2. In an ideal world, they should be, but very often they are not.

B. In our lesson today, we will observed that :

1. All Christians are church members, because the same thing that makes one a Christian also makes him a member of God's church.
2. However, there are those who become members of a local church who never become a Christian.
3. We will see this occurs because of the limitations inherent within man.

C. This is a lesson for each individual hearer to apply to himself.

1. That's true of all lessons, but particularly this one.
2. No man can look into another man's heart.
3. However, God knows the hearts of all men.
 - a. When Solomon stood before the people dedicating the temple, he prayed :
I King 8: 37-40 "...whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man ... each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and spreading his hands toward this house; **39** then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men, ..."
 - b. Likewise, the Apostles prayed :
Act 1: 24 **And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen, ..."**

D. Therefore : As we commence this study, let us each look within ourself.

1. I extend to you the same admonition the Apostle Paul extended to the brethren in the Corinthian church.
II Cor. 13: 5 **Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?**
2. All who love God want to please Him so let us each consider the following.

I. What does a church member do ?

A. Matt. 7: 15-20 ... Remember our text ... By their fruits you shall know them.

B. So, what are some of the identifying marks of a church member ?

1. They attend church services on a regular basis.
 - a. This is required for membership in any organization.
 - b. For example, the Rotary Club consistently expels members who do not attend.
2. They participate in the worship of the church.
 - a. Not just spectators (**Some churches put on a show rather than worship.**)
 - b. Sing, pray, etc.
3. Most church members stay involved with the life of the church.
 - a. They are expected to participate in fellowship.
 - b. They may even be teachers in the church.
 - c. **ILL ... A deacon of 20 years returned to his old religion after his wife died.**
4. Church members financially support the church.
 - a. Some are generous, far exceeding the 10% that is required of Christians.
 - b. They take care of special needs, benevolent requests, missions, etc.
5. Church members accept the doctrines of the church. (**At least superficially**)
 - a. Most sincerely believe in Jesus.
 - b. They are baptized and accept most things taught by the church.
 - c. Some are able to defend the faith and to advocate for it.
6. To some degree they conform to the church's standard of conduct.
 - a. They do not practice the major vices.
 - b. Most are generally moral people.

C. Does all of this sound familiar ? ... Does it remind you of anyone ?

1. It should remind you of yourself and the rest of us.
2. These are virtues shared by all Christians as well as church members.
3. We all : go to church, worship, participate, support the work, etc.

If both Christians and those who are just church members do the same things, then what's the difference ?

II. Christians are baptized INTO Christ, church members are NOT.

A. There are a variety of reasons why people are baptized.

1. To please someone they care about (Family are members, it's time for me to ..)
2. In obedience to commands
 - a. legalism
 - b. converted to doctrine
3. To join a church (They just want to belong.)

* **Baptism which does not come from the heart in response to faith is vain.**

B. Only baptism as a faith response puts one into Christ. (Surrender self)

1. **Read ... Rom. 6: 15-18**
 - a. One must be **“obedient from the heart to that form of teach ...”**
 - b. ONLY when the response comes from one's heart is he freed from serving sin.
 - c. **Rom. 6: 1-7 ...** That form of teaching is a re-enactment of the death, burial and res.
2. **Read ... Gal. 3: 26-27**
 - a. Vs. **26 ...** One becomes a child of God ONLY through faith.
 - b. Vs. **27 ..** He is placed INTO Christ ONLY when his faith causes him to be baptized.
3. **Compare ... Gal. 5: 6- For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.**

C. Therefore : Those who are baptized without faith are NOT Christians. (lost)

1. It is ONLY through faith that one enters into Christ. (Cf- **Eph. 2:8-9**)
2. One is ONLY freed from sin when his obedience is from a heart of faith. (**Rom. 6**)
3. In baptism it's not just the act of being dipped in water that saves. (Cf- **I Pet 3: 20**)

D. There are those in congregations all over the USA who were baptized w/o faith.

1. Many grew up in the church and just decided it was time to be baptized.
2. Multitudes were converted to the doctrine of the church, rather than to Christ.
 - a. Our evangelistic approach was to compare the true doctrines to denominations.
 - b. We assumed faith so we taught little about Jesus and emphasized doctrine.
 - c. **Mark 16: 15-16** **“... Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.**
16 He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; ...”
 - d. **Matt. 28:18-20 ...** Jesus commanded His followers to **“Go make disciples of all nations.”** **NOT go make church members of all nations.**

III. How do I know if I am a Christian or just a church member? (valid question)

A. The Apostle of Christ commands us to keep evaluating our faith.

1. **II Cor. 13: 5-** Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?
2. This same Apostle forbids us to evaluate the faith of anyone other than ourselves.
Rom. 14: 4- Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

B. Our problem is : man has a tendency to drift away if not kept on course.

1. **Heb. 2: 1-** For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.
2. Jesus warned that people would drift away and is calling those who do to repentance.
 - a. **Matt. 24: 12-** Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.
 - b. **Rev. 2: 4-5** But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.
5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent ...

C. When love for Jesus controls every aspect of my life, I know I'm a Christian.

1. **II Cor. 5: 14-** For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;
2. **Gal. 2: 20-** I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.
3. **Read ... Luke 9: 23 - cf - Luke 14: 26-27**
Church members set Sunday aside for Jesus – Christians set their life aside for Him.

D. I know I'm a Christian when I have been totally changed by my faith.

1. Through the ages, this has consistently been God's plea for man.
 - a. **Ezek. 18: 31-** Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit ! ...
* **Having a different heart means one's value system changes – thinks differently.**
 - b. **John 3: 5-** Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."
* **To born again is to become a totally different person.**

2. Every figure of the Christian is one who is radically changed.
 - a. **Rom. 12: 2-** And do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
 - * **The only way to be in the will of God is to have a new heart, a different heart.**
 - b. The transformation is a never ending process.
 - 1) **Eph. 4: 11-16**
 - 2) **II Pet. 1: 4-11**
3. The Christians is noticeably different from the world in thought, word, and deed.
 - a. **II Cor. 5: 15-** and He died for all, so that they who live might **no longer live for themselves**, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.
 - b. God foreordained that Christians be conformed to the image of Jesus.

Rom. 8:29 **... Compare .. foreordained to become conformed to the image of**

II Cor. 3: 18- But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed into the same image** from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.
4. When my heart is transformed into the heart of Jesus :
 - a. I will have the heart of a servant.

Mark 10:45- For even the Son of Man **did not come to be served**, but to serve, and to **give His life** a ransom for many.
 - b. I will value others above myself.

II Cor. 8: 9- For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet **for your sake He became poor**, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

CONCLUSION :

- A. **From time to time we must all ask ourselves, “*Am I a Christian, or just a member?*”**
 1. Have I been born again, developed a new heart, become different than I once was ?
 2. Do others recognize me as being different ?
- B. **Am I continuing to be transformed, or has the pew become comfortable ?**
 1. Church members attend, worship, give, participate, etc.
 2. Christians serve Jesus every day of every week of every year.
 3. If I have the heart of Christ I give my life to seeking and to serving.

INVITATION : **Have you given your life to Christ ? Are you being transformed ?**