

## What Christians Believe

What does it mean to be a Christian? Even for a pastor, this isn't the easiest question to answer! After all, somewhere between 1.5 to 2.1 billion people understand themselves to be Christians. This would represent about ¼ to 1/3 of the total world population and therefore ranks Christianity as the largest religious group.

Christianity might be the largest group, but it is certainly fragmented in a mosaic of denominations, communities, traditions, and creeds. When you consider the diversity of Christian faith communities (the spiritual liturgical solemnity of the Russian Orthodox Church as compared with the plain, no nonsense simplicity of the Amish), you might struggle to find a common denominator.

Of course, there is one! At the core our religious faith is Jesus, known to the faithful as the Christ (literally, the “anointed”, or to use the Hebrew word, the “messiah”). But beyond this foundation, and the revelation of Jesus in the books of the New Testament of the Bible, we don't always share the same beliefs nor worship in the same way.

So, what does it mean to be a Christian?

Some would suggest that a Christian is one who believes or subscribes to a set of basic religious beliefs. These would include belief in the saving death of Christ; belief that Jesus rose from the dead; belief the God became man in Jesus; belief in God who is known in a Trinity of persons. Although Christians disagree over some of the interpretation of these beliefs, we basically all affirm them. However, our Christian beliefs don't adequately define us.

Some would suggest that Christians are called to a good life. In former times, people would speak of a “righteous” life. Many people today express this as a commitment to affirming justice. Either way, Christianity hopes to be a force for good and blessing. But then, so do all other religions!

Some would suggest that Christianity is not about righteousness or justice as an outcome but rather about how we approach life. Christianity is a life style, categorized by biblical values: joyful, generous, peaceful, merciful, thankful. Sad to say, we Christians have often fallen far short of this. And so, we would be the first to remind ourselves that we are also sinful. That said, Christianity is more than doing good things.

Some would suggest that Christianity is simply about being in a relationship with Jesus, sometimes referred to as a “personal” relationship. No doubt, this is where the Christian

life begins, even if we all understand this relationship in different ways. And as a variation of this, many would suggest that to be a Christian is to be in relationship with a community of those baptized into the faith. The community takes on the identity of Christ and becomes the focus for expressing the faith. Again, this is all foundational, yet still not the very heart of the faith.

At the risk of seeming to be disrespectful to some Christians who might take exception, let me answer that I believe Christianity is in essence about affirming new life. Christians believe that we have passed from death to life in Jesus Christ. Christianity is essentially all about transformation. Our traditions and communities of faith all build on this foundation. We gather on the first day of the week, on the day of Resurrection and new beginning. We attempt to live in joyful, confident expectation. We believe that Jesus Christ is our companion and savior and in Him, all things are made new.

There is one more thing you need to know about Christians: we believe we are called to share this new life. We invite, include, and witness. The joy of new life is too much to contain. Christianity is about sharing new life. There is plenty of room for all who might like to join us!

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