

What is a Christian?

Leadership preparation for our November small group course.

- Many today regard a Christian as someone who calls himself or herself **a Christian**.
- Some think of a Christian as someone born in a family or country that is not Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish or something else.
- Some seem to think Christian means someone who behaves well or is a good, upright person.

The first usage of the name Christian is found in Acts 11:26, which says, "So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." (NIV).

This verse shows us that Christians are simply "church.... people. (who are) ... disciples" (or followers of Jesus).

The NT also gives us a number of pictures of what it means to be a Christian.

- A child of God which refers to our intimate relating with God
- A slave of God which refers to our total owning by God
- A servant of God which refers to our practical working for God
- A steward of God which refers to our responsible using of the provisions and gifts of God

Our four week small group study for November will look at these four pictures of what a Christian is from a NT perspective.

If you would like more material to help your preparation for the studies, you could listen to the four sermons I recently preached on these topics in our evening services (in August).

I will be preaching on the following four pictures of a Christian in our morning services in November and the following are summaries of what I will teach on.

For your small group study you will not deal with all this material but just highlight a few things and use some of the final reflection questions.

Session 1 - The Christian as a Child of God.

Romans 8 has great teaching on being a child of God. In this passage we see four truths about the Christian as a Child of God:

1. A Child of God is Spirit Re-Made.

Romans 8:14-16

Don't confuse being made in the Image of God, which is true for all humans (Gen. 1:26-27) with becoming a Child of God, which is only true for those who have been re-made by the re-creative work of God's Spirit.

2. A Child of God is Spirit Adopted

Romans 8:15 says that "the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship".

'The Greek word for "adoption to sonship" is a term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture.' (NIV2011 note).

In other words the child of God enjoys a very special and privileged relationship with God.

3. A Child of God experiences Spirit prayer

This is about Spirit enabled praying and an amazing intimacy with God.

Romans 8:15 says, “And by him (God’s Spirit) we cry, “Abba, Father”.

This is one of the great signs that the Spirit has indeed brought our adoption into God’s family and that we are re-made children of God, that we find within us this Spirit enabled flow of intimate prayer to our Father in heaven

Romans 8:26 -27 tells us that the Spirit also helps us to pray more deeply.

4. A Child of God is Spirit led & changed

Romans 8:5-14 has a lot of teaching about how God’s children experience Spirit led transformation and a new way of life in the Spirit.

Final reflection:

- What is our mind set on, the flesh or the Spirit?
- Is the Spirit within us a life source? How might we be sure of this?
- Are we being led by God’s Holy Spirit to put to death the misdeeds of the body, and how does this work for you?

Session 2 - The Christian as a Steward of God.

As a steward of God the focus is on our responsible using of the provisions of God.

Steward translates the Gk Oikonomos which refers to a house distributor or manager or overseer, or an employee; and especially to a manager who takes care of an Owner's property or business or household.

In the Bible we see various aspects of our Christian Stewardship, in this session we will concentrate on just one of these, namely, being stewards of God's property.

In this regard, a steward is a manager who takes care of another's property, and Jesus told a challenging parable about being stewards of the Owner's property. This parable is recorded in **Luke 16:1-15**.

In v1 "manager" translates 'oikonomon' meaning 'steward'. In v2 "management" translates 'oikonomias' meaning 'stewardship'; and "be manager" or 'to manage' translates 'oikonomeiv' meaning 'be steward'.

This parable teaches the following about the Christian as a steward of God:

1. Stewards must be shrewd or wise – v3, 8

(Shrewdness not dishonesty commended) the Greek word is φρονιμῶς meaning thoughtful or practical.

Don't be foolish or stupid with the money and stuff God has entrusted to us.

2. Stewards must use "worldly wealth" 'to gain eternal friends' – v9

The dishonest steward misused the master's accounts to make friends for when he lost his job (v4-7)

A faithful and honest steward of God's accounts will use 'worldly wealth' in preparation for eternity.

Question:

What are we doing with the money and stuff we now have that will positively impact our future in eternity? Or 'what on earth are we doing for heaven's sake?'

3. Stewards must be trustworthy with someone else's property – v10-12

(This is about rewards over and above our salvation – See 1 Cor 3:11-15)

Scary: The way we handle money & stuff in this life is a test.

What God gives us in the next life will be determined by how trustworthy we have been with God's money & stuff entrusted to us in this life.

How are we doing, do you think?

4. Stewards must decide which Master they are serving – v1

Who are we serving as our Master?

God himself or the money God has entrusted to us in this life?

5. Stewards must remember that “what people value highly is detestable in God’s sight”
vs 14-15

What do people today value highly?

Much the same as the Pharisees of Jesus day – people today often value highly or “love money” (v14) (and the nice things money can buy)

But to just “love money” is “detestable in God’s sight” (says Jesus in v15)

As stewards of God, we want to love God and faithfully use all the money God entrusts to us in this life.

What a challenge:

To see all our money (& stuff) as really belonging to God and our responsibility to be faithful stewards of God’s money and God’s property.

Final thought:

If all our money is God’s and is entrusted to us as stewards of God – then our giving to God’s work is really just a part of this faithful stewardship of God’s money.

David understood about this stewardship:

1 Chr. 29 David prayed:

v11 everything in heaven and earth is yours.

v12 Wealth and honor come from you

v14 But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this?

Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

Session 3 - The Christian as a Slave of God.

The Christian as a slave of God is about our total owning by God, and in **Romans 6** this image of slavery to God speaks about 3 important things (life, growth and freedom):

1. Life under Grace.

For some today grace means no rules or teaching to follow (libertinism/lawlessness). For example, I recently heard of a Pastor who told a couple that it was OK to live together because if they were having sex they were actually married. Sounds a bit confusing?

Is this biblical?

Is this life under the freedom of grace?

Are Christians free to just live together and have sex before a ceremony of marriage?

Not really! The bible 's definition of marriage stated in **Gen.2:24; Mt19:5; Eph. 5:31**, shows that the biblical understanding of marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman that is a socially acknowledged (by leaving father and mother), permanent commitment (the word "united" in these verses means being glued together), that is expressed in a physical relationship of sex (what I"one flesh" means).

So why might a pastor say it's ok to just live together? Possibly because this pastor has misunderstood life under grace to be lawlessness (that there is no teaching for Christians to follow).

(Beware of this popular misunderstanding of grace)

For **Rom. 6** grace means a new obedience to the teaching (of God's Word).

Rom. 6:15-17

Life under grace is obeying the teaching of God's Word and not just doing our own thing.

2. Growth in Holiness.

Rom. 6:18-23

The key words are "Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness" (v19)

Corruption vs Consecration

What are we offering ourselves to? (impurity and wickedness or righteousness and holiness)

(getting dirty or getting clean?)

3. Freedom from Sin. Rom. 6:6-7

Rom. 6:11-14 teaches 4 keys steps to freedom from sin:

Consideration (v11)

Confrontation (v12)

Consecration (v13)

Co-operation (v14)

Share how you are going in your own walk to freedom from sin.

Session 4 - The Christian as a Servant of God

It has been said that 'many people wish to serve God -- but in an advisory capacity only.'
Greek words translated as servant (or serve) in the NT:

Doulos - slave or bond servant – Rom. 1:1

Diakonos - to run errands - deacon minister or servant – Rom. 13:4

Latreuo - a hired menial servant, or worshipper – Rom. 1:9

Huperetes - assistant - (under- oarsman in a galley ship) - 1 Cor 4:1
(which we won't look at this one in this session)

Let's look at some of the things said about God's servants in Paul's letter to the Romans:

1. The commitment of a servant

Rom 1:1 – "a servant (doulos) of Jesus Christ".

Committed to the service of Jesus - are we?

Or are we basically self-serving or serving another cause?

2. The vocation (or calling) of a servant

Think of the huge variety of events at the Olympics (What are your favourite event?)
weight lifting, synchro swimming, race walking, shooting, shot put, pole vault, woman's
soccer, yachting, sprints, marathon... (and the list goes on)

But the winners all get the same gold medal.

In Romans we see various vocations or callings (which all express the same service of
God in different ways):

2.1. A calling to full time service in the church.

In Rom. 1:1 Paul was "a servant (doulos) of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set
apart for the gospel of God".

IE. Full time gospel or 'church work', one of the five-fold ministry of **Eph. 4:11**.

Another church ministry mentioned in the NT was that of deacon (diakonos) meaning 'to
run errands' or be a servant.

• In **1 Tim. 3:8** diakonos refers to a type of church leader.

• In Rom. 16:1 diakonos refers to a woman deacon – IE. ordination of woman is biblical.

2.2. A calling to full time service in the world.

In **Rom. 13:6** we see that some were obviously called to be civil authorities – "the
authorities are God's servants (diakonos), who give their full time to governing".

See **Rom. 13:4-6** - "For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do
wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants,
agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. [5] Therefore, it is necessary to
submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of
conscience. [6] This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who
give their full time to governing."

IE. Everyday 'secular work' can also be 'full time' service of God.

"Full time' Christian service may be in the church or in the world, depending on God's call

See **Col. 3:22-25** - Even as a slave in the Roman empire a Christian could be serving
Christ in their slave labour! ("it is the Lord Christ you are serving" - v24)

3. The worship of a servant

Acts 27:23 - "Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve (latreuo) stood beside me."

Latreuo means 'a hired menial servant' or a 'worshipper'.

Latreuo is used in **Rom. 1:9** – "God, whom I serve (λατρεύω)".

A similar word is used in **Rom. 12:1**- "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship (latreia – service)".

Serving God is worship, and this is more than just church services (but it does include them).

4. The gifting of a servant

Rom. 1:5 "Through him we received grace and apostleship"

Rom. 15:15-16 "the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus"

Those God calls (to "apostleship" or "to be a minister" or whatever), he equips (by his "grace").

Eph. 3:7 "I became a servant (daikonos) of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power".

In **Eph. 3:7** Paul is referring to being empowered by the Spirit of God, in **Eph. 3:16** he goes on to speak of how God would "strengthen you with power through his Spirit").

If we want to be servants of God we need to experience this "working of his power", this 'strengthening with power through his Spirit'.

What do you sense God has (may have) called you to do with your life in His service?

How do we make sure that our service is being empowered by God's Spirit of grace?