

Journey Through Spiritual Boot Camp



LESSON 1 . . . What Is a Christian?

NOTES

Every Christian needs to go through spiritual boot camp, just as every soldier must go through military boot camp. In 1970 I went through military boot camp at Fort Polk, Louisiana. There I began my military training by learning the basics of being a good soldier.

In spiritual boot camp we learn the basics of being a good Christian. However, before we can be good Christians, we must first answer the question, “What is a Christian?” If someone were to ask you that question, how would you respond? Is being a Christian belonging to a certain church? Is it being religious? Keeping the Ten Commandments? Believing the Bible? Most people don’t know the answer to the basic question, “What is a Christian?” Let’s approach the question from another direction. What verse in the Bible best describes a Christian? There are several, but one of the best is Philippians 1:21a. Write it below:

Being a Christian involves much more than what we believe; in its essence it is what we are. Most studies of the basics of the Christian faith are almost exclusively about what Christians believe, not what they are. Being a Christian is letting Jesus Christ live through us. It is becoming more and more like Jesus Christ, which is becoming more like God since Jesus is God in flesh and blood (John 1). It has always been God’s will that we be like Him. How does Genesis 1:27 declare this truth?

From the very beginning of time, God has wanted us to be like Him; not that we would be gods but that we would be godly. However, sin messed up God’s plan for us. Sin mars God’s image in our lives, but Jesus came to earth so we could become what God originally intended. Before we were born it was God’s will for us to be like Jesus, which is to be in God’s image. How does Romans 8:29a (KJV or NASB) express this truth?



God wants us to conform *to the image of his Son* so we will be as He originally intended—godly people shaped in His image. Therefore, the phrase—*For to me, to live is Christ* (Phil. 1:21a), or literally letting Christ live through us—sums up what it means to be a Christian. For this to happen, three things must be true in our lives: **we have faith in Christ, fellowship with Christ, and follow after Christ.**

First, we have faith in Christ.

Faith in Christ begins by acknowledging we can do nothing to save and change ourselves. A Christian is someone who acknowledges that through Christ's death on the cross, God provided a way for each of us to be saved from the penalty and marring of our own sin. Unfortunately, many people who know what a Christian is still trust in the wrong things. They trust in their good moral character, their church membership, their good deeds, etc. However, the Bible declares: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God* (Eph. 2:8). Then, how does the next verse clarify salvation by grace through faith?

If you ask the average person if they are going to heaven, he or she would probably say, “I hope so; I am doing the best I can.” In other words, “I” (self) “am doing” (works) the best I can. That's not what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is someone who trusts in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

The word *faith* (PISTIS, pis'-tis) in the NT means a firm persuasion or to believe in something to the degree it changes your life. Faith in Christ is not the same thing as believing things **about** Christ. For example, many people believe the facts about the life and death of Adolf Hitler. But to have faith **in** Hitler would make you a Nazi. Faith causes us to do two things that change our lives forever. In the last sentence of Mark 1:15, how does Jesus sum up what we must do to become a Christian?

First, we must *repent* (METANOEŌ, met-ahn-ah-eh'-oh), which means a change of mind followed by a change in behavior. This means you stop living your life like you want and start living like God wants.

Second, we must *believe the good news*, or the Gospel, which means we believe two things: Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and He rose from the dead to prove all He taught was true.

God has made it as simple as He possibly can for us to become a Christian; therefore, we must resist the temptation to make it complicated. We must remember the KISS principle: Kep It Simple Somehow. We must

let people know that to become a Christian, they must do two simple things: *repent* of their sins and *believe* the Gospel.

What is a Christian? If we are Christians, we have **faith in Christ** and . . .

Second, we fellowship with Christ.

Paul wrote *for to me, to live is Christ*, which means Christ was literally living through him. Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship. As Christians, we are sometimes in danger of losing Jesus amid the wonders of God’s Word. Jesus is a Person, not a book or an impersonal force. The Bible is God’s holy, inspired Word, but God doesn’t want us to have a relationship with the Bible; He wants us to use the Bible to learn how to have a personal relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. How does 1 Corinthians 1:9 reveal this truth?

The word *fellowship* (KOINONIA, coin-oh-nee'-ah) literally means “partnership” or “participation.” *Fellowship* means we are partners with Christ and participate in becoming the person He wants us to be. Faith in Christ leads to fellowship with Christ. How do we cultivate fellowship with Christ? It requires three things.

1. Fellowship with Christ requires the right place. There are places that can lead us away from Christ, but there are also places that draw us closer to Him. All week long our fellowship with Christ is attacked by the world, and as a result we sometimes get discouraged. That’s why we need to obey what command in Hebrews 10:25 if we are to maintain our fellowship with Christ?

Cultivating and maintaining fellowship with Christ requires the right kind of stimuli, such as being in the presence of other believers, hearing appropriate music, and hearing the Word of God taught and preached. Therefore, we must be in the right place.

2. Fellowship with Christ sometimes requires pain. Our fellowship with Christ most often brings excitement and joy. Yet, there are other times when it involves pain and suffering. Paul wrote about the fellowship of Christ’s *sufferings* (Phil. 3:10), which refers to a deep partnership or

communion with Christ in suffering. Our most intimate times of fellowship are times of intense suffering that result from living for Him and His purpose for our lives. During these times we have a unique, close encounter with the power and presence of Christ. How does Paul describe this truth in 2 Corinthians 12:10?

Our deepest fellowship with Christ is when we partner in His suffering and experience His presence and power in a way we can at no other time.

3. Fellowship with Christ requires patience. Fellowship with Christ is not automatic; it is a process that takes time. As already mentioned, the process can be painful. Paul writes *that suffering produces perseverance*, or patience (Rom. 5:3). Then, in verse 4 what does Paul say *perseverance*, or patience, produces?

Patiently enduring suffering produces the character of Christ in our lives. This is the end result of fellowship with Christ; it makes us like Christ and more in the image of God.

What is a Christian? If we are Christians, we have **faith in Christ**, we **fellowship with Christ**, and . . .

Third, we follow after Christ.

It is interesting that of all the apostles in the NT, the one whose conversion experience comes quickest to our minds is Paul's. His is a very dramatic experience, with a blinding light from heaven and an audible voice speaking to him. However, that is the only such conversion experience in the New Testament. None of the other disciples experienced a blinding light or a voice from heaven. The other disciples' conversion experiences consisted of responding to a simple invitation from Christ. Though the invitation varies somewhat, notice two key words in each one. Jesus said to Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, "*Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*" (Mt 4:19). To Matthew and Philip, He simply said, "*Follow me*" (Mt 9:9 & John 1:43). Jesus' invitation has not changed. What invitation does He give to you and me in Matthew 16:24?



In its simplest form, Christ's invitation to each of us is "Follow Me." Are you following Christ? Maybe you don't know for certain. To find out, all you must do is fill in the blank in the following statement: "For to me to live is _____."

If you were totally honest, what word or words would you put in the blank? "Money," "work," "a hobby," "school," "career," or what? If you are to follow Jesus, you must forsake anything and everything that is keeping you from conforming to His image. Peter and Andrew had to leave their nets. Matthew had to leave his money tables. Following Christ means we must leave whatever holds us back from following Him.

Now that we have answered the question, "What is a Christian," let's make that question personal: Are YOU a Christian? You are if you have **faith in Christ, fellowship with Christ, and follow after Christ.** Which of these things is most difficult for you, and what can you do beginning today to become a better Christian?
