

# Are You a Christian?

by Alan Redpath

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*Alan Redpath challenges listeners to examine their faith and commitment to Christ, emphasizing the importance of being a true Christian rather than just an 'almost' Christian.*

**Duration:** 46:42

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Acts 11:26, Acts 26:24, Acts 26:27-29, Acts 26:32

**Topics:** "Christian"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a grocer in a small village who hears his son's voice calling to him from the basement. The son wants to come to his father, but is hesitant because he cannot see him. The father reassures his son that he can see him and encourages him to jump into his arms. The speaker then relates this story to the Christian faith, explaining that many believers have allowed something to hinder the power of God in their lives, leaving them defeated and ineffective. The speaker challenges Christians to examine their own lives and strive to be obvious, powerful, and vital in their faith.

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## Transcript

How are you all tonight? This is a wonderful convention, isn't it? If I may say so, I think you've got the finest teenage choir I've ever heard in my life. I have just been suggesting to the choir leader that I would like them all to come back to Scotland with me. All expenses paid by them.

Well, that would be wonderful. Well, you folk who are much nearer heaven than I am, way, way up there near the roof, I'm just saying to you tonight as a matter of interest, can you hear what is being said? Thank you very much. Now, just before I bring to you the word, let us turn to the Lord of the word in prayer.

Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. Lord, we all acknowledge this, but the question in our hearts is, has it got our soul, our life, our all? Search us, we pray thee, and find us out and track us down, and bring us to the place of availability, total commitment to the living Lord Jesus. Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.

Speak just now, some message to meet my need, which thou only dost know. Speak now through thy holy word, and make me see some wonderful truth thou hast to show to me. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

I can't help wondering whether perhaps some of you in this hall tonight are still questioning in your mind, what's all this Christianity business about anyway? I don't see why I should bother very much about being

a Christian. Let me just take a moment to say a word to anybody who's thinking like that. You need to bother about Christianity, and especially about Christ, because there's a basic, vital need in your life, which only Christ can meet.

And that need is described by the Bible by one word of three letters, sin. The things which unite us all go much deeper than the things which divide us. Different backgrounds, different races, different colours, different countries, all may be represented here tonight and all different.

But there's one common denominator which unites us all in a basic need, and that is the fact that we have all sinned. That doesn't mean necessarily that we're all immoral. If you think that's what the Bible means by sin, you're wrong.

The Bible doesn't mean that by sin. Perhaps you've often heard it said that we don't become sinners because of the sins that we commit. We commit sins because we are sinners.

Sin is not something that I do, it's something that I am by nature. And all of us have within us a rebel heart that's against God, against Christ, that wants its own way, demands its own rights, and refuses to give in to anybody. Of course, it shows itself in different ways.

When my older daughter, who is now a missionary in Africa, was about eight years old, I think, her boyfriend came to see her. He was nine at the time. Oh, don't worry, it's all off now.

She married somebody else. As a matter of fact, this incident settled the whole business. I happened to be sitting in my dining room window, and I noticed her swinging on the garden gate.

Perhaps it was parental pride, but I thought she was looking rather sweet. The boyfriend arrived about ten minutes late. That's a very bad thing to do.

And obviously he didn't approve of her that day, and he started climbing up on the gate beside her. I saw her give him a tremendous dig with her elbow in the ribs, and he slipped, fell on the back of his head in the path, and looked as if he'd been rather shocked. Now, no Englishman takes that from a girl lying down.

So he got up and got alongside her and smacked her face good and hard. What was my amazement to see my daughter, who I always thought was rather a placid child, get hold of him with both her hands round the throat and shake him like a rat. In a few seconds, they both fell off the gate, and they had a stand-up fight on my garden path.

I had to go out and rescue him. Well, poor fellow, what chance had he with nails and teeth? When I got them separated and when I got the situation under control and sat down in my room again, I thought to myself, my, what on earth started all that? Well, it was just two people, one of whom was jealous of the other, both of whom had a shocking temper, blew their top, low boiling point, and the only answer to it was a stand-up fight. Now, don't accuse me of being childish, but I do want to be childlike because there's nothing complicated about basic Christianity.

But I want to say to you that that's the kind of thing which causes international conflict. It's also the kind of thing which causes the queue at the divorce court, which causes the breakdown in marriage, which is at the root of unhappy homes, selfishness, pride, the refusal to give in one to another, the failure to recognise the rights of other people, the absolute impossibility of running our own life, which in the Bible is called sin. Now, there's your problem.

Very graphically, that's your problem, and mine, the problem of what I am by nature. And the more I work at it, and the more I try, and the more I struggle with it, the less I succeed, the more I fail. And there's only one who has the answer to that problem, that is Jesus.

And his answer is to give to me a new self, to impart into my life the gift of his Holy Spirit that I might live in Christ and find in him the power to overcome my old self. Now, the question I want to get at tonight, very simply and briefly, is just this. Are you a Christian? Are you a real Christian? A vital Christian? Not a nominal one, but a real one.

How can I answer that question? Well, how many times in the New Testament do you think the word Christian appears? I once asked that to a smaller group than this, and asked them to reply. The replies varied from 10 to 500. The truth of the matter is, the word only occurs three times.

And I want you to look at the three places in the New Testament where the word occurs for us to understand what it means to be a real Christian. The first of them is in Acts chapter 26 and verse 28. The portion that was read to us earlier in the service.

We break in on the story of Paul's defense before Kilgripper. And as he gave his testimony to his salvation, to his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, and as he warmed up to his theme, Festus, the governor, interrupted him and said, Paul, the trouble with you is you've got religious mania. You're mad.

To which Paul replied, I'm not mad, Festus. Look, Kilgripper, he knows what I'm talking about. He believes the prophets.

Agrippa, believest thou? And Agrippa, in that electric atmosphere, said to Paul, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. It's very difficult to tell whether Agrippa was being sarcastic or whether he really meant it. Whether he was saying, do you really think that with such little persuasion as that you can make me, the greater Agrippa, a Christian? Or whether he was saying, Paul, it wouldn't take much more persuasion on that line to convince me about Christianity.

I don't know. But this much I do know is that almost is failure. And it's terribly possible for any of us to be almost a Christian, but not quite.

How often in life you get very near to something, but not quite there. I remember once playing in a very exciting game of rugby football in the north of England for one of our counties called Northumberland against another county, Yorkshire. It was the final county championship match of the season.

Whichever team won that match would be champion county for the year. Two minutes from the end of the game, Yorkshire were leading by what is called one drop goal to nil. That is, or was at that time, four points to nil.

Just before the final whistle blew, the ball came out of our scrum. The scrum half got it, flashed it across to his out half, who cut down the middle, passed it to his inside three-quarter back, out to the wing, three-two, who tore down the touchline and was tackled just as he scored at the corner flag. Yorkshire four points, Northumberland three.

Now I'm not here to give a lecture on how to play rugger, but I have to say that at rugby football, as you probably know, that try, every try, has to be converted. And of course it's done by kicking the ball over the

horizontal bar between the two uprights, and if you do that, you get an extra two points. If you don't, you get nothing.

I was very sorry for the fellow who had to take that kick, especially as it happened to me. And I went back 25 yards, the prescribed distance, at right angles to the place where the ball had been, the try had been scored, and I put the ball down very near the touchline. The goal posts were way, way over there, and the angle was so narrow that it almost seemed impossible.

Tremendous distance. And I aimed the ball very straight and took time about it, and I took six steps back. And the silence, the silence, there were 30,000 people around the ground that day, and I tell you, at that moment, the silence was just like that.

And then the only thing I could hear was my heart beating. And I ran forward and gave the ball a terrific route, and it soared into the air right over between those goal posts, and I heard the crowd roar, he's got it, it's a goal! But just on the way down, I saw it, breathlessly, I saw it begin to twist of its course, and as it came down, it hit one of the upright bars, and came down on the wrong side. Thank you for your sympathy.

It's about 35 years late, that's the only trouble. And I remember when we went back home that night by our special reserved compartment in the train, our scrum half, who for reasons I don't need to go into here, was inclined to be talkative on Saturday evenings, he was very talkative that night. And he looked at me and he said, I'm putting this in evangelical language, he said, why didn't you miss the rotten thing altogether? Why didn't you just fall on your back? Or why didn't you turn round to the opposite direction and kick it into the grandstand? Why miss it by a sixteenth of an inch? Oh, you see, I don't mind you smiling at my illustration, but I want to ram home the principle, almost meant defeat.

Almost was failure. Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. Are you almost a Christian? I mean, a member of church, baptised, christened, confirmed? Attending every Sunday a member of Christian endeavour? You've signed an evangelical statement of faith? You've said that you believe everything that the Bible believes, but none of those things make you a Christian.

You're not a Christian because of what you believe. You're not a Christian because of something that's in your head, that you believe certain facts about Jesus. The Bible says, believe into the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

And the faith which makes a man a Christian is always a faith that moves. You've probably heard of the story of that famous tightrope walker, Blunden, who was once going to walk on a tightrope over Niagara Falls. And a huge crowd watched him do it.

And as the crowd gathered and as he began to go over Niagara on that tightrope, he suddenly saw a small boy watching him, with his eyes bulging out. So he stopped, turned round, came back and said, son, do you believe that I can walk on this tightrope over Niagara? Sure I do, sir. Son, do you believe that I could carry you on my back on this tightrope over Niagara? Yes, sir.

All right, he said, come on, jump on my back and let's go. The boy turned round and fled for his life. Hold that in your mind a minute and come with me to a little village that I visited once in the United States, in Kentucky, called Viper.

And in that village there's one little grocer's store, that's all. And one day the grocer was down in the basement counting his stock, way, way down. He'd gone down by a rickety old ladder, which he had removed, and he was way down below surface in the semi-darkness, when he heard a voice saying to him, Daddy, the voice of his nine-year-old boy.

And he came along the basement in the darkness and looked up to the trap door, way up there on the ground floor, and he saw his little boy peering at him. And he said, Yes, son. Daddy, I want to come to you.

And he held out his hands and said, All right, son, come, jump. Oh, but Daddy, I can't see you. No, son, you can't see me, but I can see you, jump.

And the little boy jumped and fell right into the arms of his father. Listen, Blondin's boy believed in Blondin. He believed all the facts about Blondin, all the truth about Blondin, but he wasn't prepared to commit himself to Blondin.

Whereas that grocer's boy just simply trusted his daddy and fell right into his arms. Believe into the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust in him, and he shall bring it to pass.

And faith is a step into the dark onto a rock, and that rock is Christ. And you're not a Christian, my friend, you're not a believer, and you haven't got an answer to the problem of sin in your life until you've taken that step. I remember a great friend of mine, of whom you've probably heard, Major Ian Thomas, was preaching at Moody Church in Chicago for me one Sunday, and his subject, which absolutely rocked the whole congregation, was unsaved believers.

Do you know it's possible to believe everything that you should believe and yet be on the road to hell? Do you know that it's possible to be right in your head but wrong in your heart? To have your head full of truth but your heart empty of life, and nobody is a Christian until they get into right relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus, and that means selling out and committing their lives into the control of Jesus Christ as Lord. I spoke at a Youth for Christ meeting at a place called Stoke-on-Trent a little while ago. If you have any Wedgwood china in your home and you turn it upside down, if it's the real article, it probably comes from Stoke-on-Trent.

I met there a Salvation Army officer, and he told me about his conversion. He was converted at a Salvation Army open air meeting, and the next morning he went to the holiness meeting, and he came back home absolutely miserable, and his wife said to him, what's the matter with you? I thought you were converted last night. Oh yes, he said, but they all had a red jersey on, and I hadn't got one.

Oh, she said, that's easy, I'll knit you one. So she knitted him a colossal red jersey, because he was a big man, and he went out the next Sunday with his huge jersey on him, and when he came back he was still more miserable. She said, what's the matter with you now? Oh, he said, they all had white letters on their red jersey but me, and I hadn't any.

And she didn't know what to do about that, because she couldn't read or write. So the next morning as she was sitting at the window wondering what to do, she saw a man get up a ladder outside a shop and begin to paint a sign. Oh, she said, I know what I'll do, I'll copy everything that man writes on that sign onto his jersey.

And so she did, and he went out the next Sunday, and he came back beaming. He said, my dear, you done it, everybody said it was the best jersey that anybody had on. Do you know what he had written on it? This business is under entirely new management.

Say, that's what it means to be a Christian. Nothing less than that. This business of my life is under new management.

I haven't got the keys, no, I don't hold the reins, I don't try and keep control, it's under the control of the Lord, Jesus Christ. He's my master and my Lord. Are you almost a Christian? Think about that.

Almost. You have no power, no reality. Everything that these folk have sung and said to you by way of testimony was sheer nonsense to you and your personal experience, simply because that transaction has never taken place.

Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. But you're not completely a Christian until that day your life is committed to the Lord who loved you and gave himself for you at the cross and rose again the third day and lives in heaven that he might live by his Spirit in your heart. Now let's look just for a second at the second example.

In Acts 11, chapter 26, I read, the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. Something strange had happened in that town. A few people had visited it whom the inhabitants didn't understand.

They were so different. There was something about them that was absolutely unique, so they had to find a new name for them. They hadn't got a name and a vocabulary.

So they called them Christians. It was a name given in sarcasm. It really meant belonging to Christ.

It's always interested me that they didn't call them Jesuits, belonging to Jesus, followers of Jesus, but they called them Christians, belonging to a risen Lord, linked by faith to a mighty God. They were first called Christians at Antioch. Something in their behavior, in the way they lived, gave themselves away.

They couldn't hide the fact that they belonged to Jesus. Now, these people were what I would call obvious Christians. And what I want to ask you tonight, if you are a Christian, what sort of a Christian are you? Listen, how long would it take for other people to discover when they're in your company that you belong to Christ, that you're a Christian? Does your speech and does your behavior give you away? Is there something about you so different? I don't mean peculiar.

I don't mean negative. I don't really mean, oh, I'm a Christian, therefore I don't go to the cinema, or I don't go to the theater, or I don't gamble, or I don't smoke. I don't mean that.

But I belong to Christ, and because of him, and because of his life lived in me, somehow you give the show away. Are you an obvious Christian? Is there something about you that conveys the presence of the Lord Jesus, that makes people know that you belong to him, and you love him, and you live for him? That was the kind of Christians these disciples were at Antioch. They were first called Christians.

They were linked by an anchor, which didn't go down to the bottom of the ocean, but which went right up to the throne of God. And they had an anchor in heaven, and because of that, he was sending down daily supplies, and daily strength, and daily power, so that every day of their lives there was the reality of the living Christ seen in them. Oh my word, how this town, this city, how your church, how this continent needs

to have Christian people like that.

Obvious Christians. Are you an obvious Christian? I remember a little while ago, I bought a car. It was second hand, and I paid 35 pounds for it.

It was said to be eight horsepower. It was the kind of car I get into. I don't put it on.

I put it on. I don't get into. And when I put that car on, I was driving it one day up a very steep hill in the Midlands of England, and when I got to the bottom of the hill, it said, there was a notice that said gradient one in three and a half, and up alongside that notice, there's a picture of the mountain up which I was going to climb.

You could see it, all the bends and the curves, and above it, there was an advertisement which said, ethyl for power, just try it. And a racing car was going up that hill at about 90 miles an hour. Ethyl for power.

Ethyl being a particular brand of gas that we used in England. So I felt very good about that because I'd filled up my little eight horsepower car with ethyl only 20 minutes before, so I put my foot on the floor, and way off we went, but not at 90 miles an hour. As a matter of fact, halfway up the hill, the mountain, a little drop of water got in the carburettor of the engine.

It was raining, pouring, absolutely streaming down, as it does in that part of the country so often. And a little drop of rainwater got in the carburettor, and four of those horses died on the spot. And we chugged up to the top of the hill, boiling and perspiring.

And when I got to the top, I said, ethyl for power. What a nerve. And then I thought to myself, oh, but it wasn't ethyl's fault.

Ethyl was perfectly all right, nothing the matter with her. But I'll tell you what had happened. In the course of a steep uphill ascent, a tremendous climb, a little foreign substance had got in the line which communicated power from the tank to the motor, and put the motor out of action.

Now listen, if you're a Christian, if you belong to Jesus, why aren't you an obvious Christian? Why aren't you a powerful Christian? Why aren't you a vital Christian? I'll tell you why. Because in the course of a pretty steep uphill climb towards heaven, against storm and wind and tide, something has got into the line which communicates power from the throne to your heart, and left you absolutely impotent. And listen, if everybody knew the truth about your Christian experience tonight, you'd be hiding your head in shame.

For you're a defeated, miserable, sad, lonely Christian. Not an obvious Christian, but a defeated one. Is that your experience? Oh, somehow or other you came to Jesus, and it was so wonderful.

You thought that all sin had been dealt with and it would never trouble you again, but you hadn't been a Christian for a week before you found it hit back at you harder than ever, and you went down. And though you belonged to Christ, and you had a link by faith with the throne in heaven, you failed to appropriate the power of the risen Lord, and you started battling and fighting and trying and struggling, and down you went. And some of you are at this convention, and you're as miserable as sin.

You listen to it all, and the happiness of other people, and all the songs they sing, and it all just goes over your head, and you feel miserable. Indeed, it makes you annoyed. You don't know what they're all so happy about, and so exultant about.

Oh, my dear friend, you're not an obvious Christian, are you? You're a defeated Christian. Yours is the language of the apostle Paul in Romans 7. The good that I would, I do not. The evil that I hate, that I do.

It's a terrible thing to be unconverted. It's a terrible thing not to trust in Christ. It's an awful thing not to be a Christian, but I'll tell you what's worse.

It's to be a child of God, to be a child of a king, to be linked by faith with a living God, but to be a defeated Christian, beaten. I lived in Chicago for 10 years, and I've always been a very keen follower of cricket. And I remember one year when I was in Chicago, there was a series of test matches being played in England between England and Australia.

And I was very anxious to see what was happening, and I bought every Chicago newspaper. And my, if you know American newspapers, that's like buying a library. They're huge, fat things.

And I turned every page of every paper, and there wasn't a word about cricket. Their only interest in a game called baseball, sort of grown-up rounders. I couldn't understand it.

However, one of my friends in England, knowing my interest, sent me a copy of the London Daily Telegraph by airmail. And I knew exactly why it sent it, and I tore off the cover, and I knew where to look for the cricket news. Not in the back page, but in the front page.

Nobody cares in England what's happening to the government or anybody else. It's what's happening when the test match is on, and I open the telegraph, and oh, my heart sank. For right across the headlines of the London Daily Telegraph were these words, England facing defeat.

What a sad day. I went to my church. Nobody in the staff there cared two straws.

I had no sympathy. I couldn't get back to England and sympathise. Not that I could have done anything about it if I had, but it would have been such a privilege to weep with those who wept.

But two days later, another paper came, and I opened it with a sense of foreboding. What would it say? And written right across the front page of the Daily Telegraph was these words, England in sight of victory. In two days, the whole situation had been completely transformed.

Listen, my friend. I want you to answer this question not to me, but to the Lord in whose presence we meet tonight. Tell me, honestly, in your life, are you facing defeat, or are you in sight of victory? Which? An obvious Christian? Oh, no.

All the joy, all the lilt, all the thrill, and all the song has died out in your Christian life because of S-I-N. And you haven't found the answer. One more thing.

There's one other passage. It's in 1 Peter 4, 16, and it says this, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed on this behalf. If any man suffer as a Christian, I mean, not because he's unpleasant, not because he's merely nasty with people, not because he's difficult to get on with, but if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.

You see, a Christian is somebody who's up against something. Ephesians 6, 12 says we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against power, against rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places. We're against something.

We're fighting against something. And if you're against something, it costs. You can't be popular and be a Christian.

A man who's only been born once will always persecute someone who's been born twice. If you've experienced the life of Christ in you, then you're up against something. What's your Christianity cost you? Has it cost you perhaps someone who's very dear to you? Perhaps some boy has given you up because you're a Christian and he isn't, and it's torn your heart apart.

If any boy gives up a girl, or if any girl gives up a boy for that matter, because they're a Christian and he isn't, he's better out of your life altogether. But Christianity, has it cost you something? Really cost you? Just before I left Scotland, I was out for a walk one day, thinking about my visit here, anticipating it and praying about it, and I walked alongside one of our Scottish lakes, which are called Loughs. Some of them have a sea outlet, this one had.

And I saw in the middle of that lake, a man up to his waist in water, with a line in his hand, doing this, letting it in, pulling it in, letting it out. And as he pulled it in, it trembled, quivered. And he let it out again, and he pulled it in, let it out.

This went on for about 20 minutes, until I was so impatient to know, so I said to him, excuse me sir, but what are you doing with that fish? And without looking round, but still letting out his line, he said, I'm drowning it. Yeah, exactly. That's what I thought.

Drowning a fish? Why, I'm not, I may be green, but I'm not so bad as that. Goodness, you can't do that. And I watched him go on like this, you see.

And then he looked at me, but he still had his line, pulling it, letting it out, and he said, I am. He said, I've got a great big seawater salmon on the end of that line, about that long. And if I pull it in right now, it would snap my line.

But he said, I'm playing with it. I'm tiring it out. And when I've got it tired out, I'll turn its head downstream, and it'll drown, because it'll get water in its gills.

Only a live salmon can swim against the stream. I was so interested in that story, that I wanted to get a book about fishing to find out if it was true. Of course, having lived in Scotland, the easiest thing to do was to go to the public library, where I could read a book free, and I read a book about fishing, and it told me that he was telling the truth.

For at spawning season, salmon from the ocean come right up the loch for spawning, and he got one on the hook, and he caught it, and it was so big, he couldn't pull it in, and he was playing with it, and tiring it out, until he turned his head downstream, and drowned it. My dear fellow, it's so wonderful to have this wonderful, precious privilege to talk to you. I'm just through tonight, I'm finished, but I want to say to you this, there's someone, and his name is Satan, who's got hundreds of you in here tonight on the hook, and he's playing with you, and he wants you to swim downstream.

Any fool can do that, anybody can do that, can go with the stream, but it takes a man with all the power of God in his life to swim against the tide. Are you, are you paying the price of unpopularity, of being thought square, not with it, because you're standing for Jesus against the tide? You're a Christian? What sort of a Christian are you? Let's pray. Just a moment's silence.

Let's ask the Lord to make this matter real in our hearts, that we may be perfectly clear as to whether or not we belong to Jesus. And if we do, whether we're victorious, whether we're paying the price, really standing for the Lord. And if you're not a Christian, you come to Jesus now.

Let him take control of your life. He died and rose and ascended into heaven and gives you his spirit to dwell within you that he might control. Dear Lord, we do pray that thou will by thy spirit ram the truth of thy word home to every heart, that none of us may leave this place undecided, uncommitted, half-surrendered, defeated.

Oh Lord, send us out in victory, in victory through the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. We ask it for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Would you turn with me please to hymn number five?

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