

Who is a Christian

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into the topic of what truly defines a Christian, emphasizing the importance of genuine faith, repentance, obedience, and producing good fruit as evidence of a transformed life. It challenges misconceptions about Christian identity based on ethnicity, church membership, political affiliation, knowledge of the Bible, and religious practices, highlighting the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a heart change.

Scripture: Matthew 7:13, Matthew 7:21, James 2:19, Luke 3:8, John 3:16, Matthew 7:20, Matthew 7:21, Philippians 3:5, Matthew 6:7

Topics: "True Christian Identity", "Transformation through Faith"

Description

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Transcript

Matthew chapter 7, I'm going to break away from Luke, we still have I think two sessions left in Luke which we'll come to next week hopefully, but I wanted to speak with you on the subject of who is not a Christian. This is based on some of the events in the Supreme Court this last week, and I'm not going to make many political statements, but that together with a number of other things, I got a very long email from someone who tried to make the point that I am not a Christian because I preach in a formal building. And so what is a Christian? What makes a Christian? The problem is that we have so many wrong ideas about what a Christian is, and I think it's important for us, and particularly from here to the end of the year, I want to share some very important things so that we can establish those principles, which I've shared with you over the years, but I think it's important that we reestablish them, that we firmly understand, because the problem today is that more people believe they are Christians than are not.

We have a real problem in the world today. And so let's turn to the Word, and we're going to read from Matthew chapter 7, I think I said, so Matthew chapter 7, and I'm going to read verses 7 through 20. Matthew chapter 7, reading verses 7 through 20.

Matthew chapter 7, verse 7, oh sorry, verse 13. Why did I write 7? Verse 13, Matthew chapter 7, verse 13. Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction.

And there are many who go in by it, because narrow is the gate, and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.

Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes, and figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire, therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven, many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. The passage begins in verse 13, where Jesus speaks about the narrow and the broad way, and I've shared with you before that the concept of the narrow way is generally seen to be a Christian way, and the broad way is the way of the world. But in fact, if you read the context very carefully, you'll see that in fact he is not saying that the narrow way, that the broad way is the way of the world, but the broad way is a religious way, because he says there are those who will say, Lord, Lord.

So they acknowledge the lordship of Jesus, they have preached in his name, they've performed miracles, they've cast out demons, so they have done religious things, and yet he says, I never knew you. So the broad way is a religious way, particularly in so-called Christian societies, like in the United Kingdom and here in America, and in many parts of Africa, where society is generally seen to be Christian, that broad way is a religious way, because there are many who are on that way, thinking that they are saved, but in fact they are not. And so we need to just deal with some of these wrong concepts.

The problem here is that the difference is sometimes very small, very subtle. The first one, for example, that we're going to look at is believing. People say, well, I believe.

And yes, we are saved by faith. But at the same time, there is a faith that is the right faith, and there is a faith that is the wrong faith. I'm not speaking about what kind of religion, I'm speaking about believing.

And in James 2, verse 19, James says, you believe that there is one God, you do well. But even the demons believe, and they tremble. So the devils believe in God.

They believe in Jesus. They believe in the resurrection, I'm pretty sure. They believe in the Bible.

And yet, we know that they are not saved, but they are demons, and they are destined for hell. But do you want to know, oh foolish man, that faith without works is dead? So faith without works is dead. Now that's a whole other subject, but he's clearly saying that there is a faith that saves, and there is a faith that is not saved.

The problem is today that we speak about believers. We say, is he a believer? Well, many people believe, just like the demons believe, and yet they are not saved. We have this concept of cheap grace, where, yeah, I believe in the Lord Jesus, so I'm saved.

No, that in itself does not save. And I know that it comes as a shock to many people, but we'll speak about that in a little bit more detail later on. The second thing, and I struggled in getting these things in order, and they're not in any particular order, I'm just trying to put them together logically, is that I'm a member of the

church.

Now it doesn't matter what church, whether it's this church or any other church. The fact that you're a member of the church does not save you. And again, there are many, many people, and there are people, there may be people in this church who believe they are saved because they've been members of this church for, sometimes, for decades.

They've been members of this church for a long time. And so they say, well, I'm saved because I'm a member of Sun Valley Community Church. Sun Valley Community Church cannot save you.

No church can save you. Membership of any church does not save. And any church, it doesn't matter how good that church may be, is a mixture of those who are saved and those who are not.

Jesus tells the parable of the wheat and the tares. So in Matthew chapter 25, verse 11, afterward the other virgins came. So Jesus tells a parable of virgins who are invited to the wedding.

The fact that they are virgins and they're invited to the wedding seems to indicate that they are part of the people of God, that they may be what we would call Christians. But the bridegroom tarries to come. You remember what happens is that they run out of oil.

Some had extra oil, some didn't. Now, I don't want to get too sidetracked because otherwise we're not going to get through. I have many points this morning and we have little time.

But afterward the other virgins came and said, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, assuredly I say to you, I do not know you. So they had been regarded as part of those who are the people of God.

They were virgins. They were invited to the wedding feast. They for all intents and purposes looked like everyone else.

But he says, I don't know you. And so there's an outward membership that comes with being virgins and being invited to the wedding in the case of this parable. And there are outside or outward manifestations of saying, well, you know, I go to an evangelical church.

I go to this kind of church or that kind of church. But clearly that doesn't work. And in fact we'll see some other scriptures where Paul speaks about the things that he claims.

One of the things that really has become a problem today in a very big way, and it's a problem not because of a political reason, but it's a problem because many are deceived into believing they are Christians when in fact they are not. And one of the problems we have today is that there are at least 50% of Americans believe that they are Christians because they are American. And we have the same problem in England and we have the same problem in some African countries.

The fact that you are American does not make you a Christian. And I'm not going to get into the issue of whether there's such a thing as a Christian nation or not, but basically there isn't. But in John chapter 8 verse 33, they answered him, we are Abraham's descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone.

How can you say you will be made free? So they were claiming their ethnicity. Now if anyone could claim their ethnicity as being a credit towards their salvation, the Jews could, because they were God's chosen

people. And yet we know that the Jews were not saved because they were Jews.

But each individual Jew needed to get saved by his personal relationship with God. And so we know that many came out of Egypt, but not many made it into the promised land. And so claiming ethnicity, whatever that ethnicity may be, and in fact there's whole theologies revolving around this.

There's a thing called British Israelism, which has a form in South Africa called Africana Israelism, where people claim, well we're part of the missing tribes of Israel and therefore we are God's people. No ethnicity, whether it's Jewish or American or British or whatever, makes us a Christian. I just find it interesting that one of the things that they claim is that we're free, which is a claim which is very popular here.

And so we have religious liberty and that shows that we are Christians. The next verse says, Jesus answered them, most assuredly I say to you, whoever commits sin is the slave of sin. So what is Jesus doing? They say, we are Christians because we are, because of our nationality.

And Jesus says, look at how you live. Jesus says, whoever commits sin is the slave of sin. They say we're free, because we're Jews.

Jesus says you're not free, because you're slaves of sin. The idea of liberty, and obviously we appreciate political liberty, but the idea of political liberty is of no value, when in fact you're enslaved to sin. Because you're still a slave, you're still not free, because you're bound by sin and by addictions and by addiction to sin itself.

One of the things that they love to claim in the Old Testament and in the time of Jesus is their morality, oh we keep the law, we do everything right. And when I said that it's connected to the events of this last week, that there are many writers and there are many politicians and there are many people who this last week claimed that because Roe versus Wade was overthrown, and that's a good thing, but because it's overthrown, that proves that we are good people, that we are Christians. Well nobody lived better lives than the scribes and the Pharisees, and I'm not being sarcastic, I'm being serious.

But Jesus says, woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of extortion and self-indulgence. So whether as a nation or whether individually we live moral lives, we don't commit abortion, we don't commit adultery, we don't engage in homosexuality, we do all of these things, yes those things are good and right, but it doesn't change the heart. And so Jesus says you can wash the outside as much as you like, folk in America we can pass as many laws as we like against every possible sin, we can go back to prohibition and ban any form of alcohol and any form of drugs, and yeah maybe there's good to that, we can lock up everybody who spits on the street, but it's never going to make us a righteous people, because you can only become righteous when your heart has been changed, and it can only be changed by the gospel.

And so all we're involved in, and all so-called Christian nations are involved in, is trying to wash the outside of the cup when in fact the inside remains unchanged and filthy. The next verse he says, blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

It's no good if it looks good on the outside, it's what's in the inside that matters. And then verse 28, even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. And so the fact that as a nation, or the fact that individually we live moral lives, we uphold morality, we're against all kinds of sin, does not make us Christians.

It does not make us Christians. And this is one of the things that we really need to come to terms with, because nobody was more moral than these Pharisees. They had rules against everything.

They stayed, not just stayed away from any kind of sin and breaking the commandments of God, but they stayed far away, they created laws upon laws upon laws that made sure that you didn't get anywhere near breaking those commandments. And yet their hearts were not right, and that's where the problem is. Now the next one is going to shock you, and then that's the end of my political statements.

But being a member of the right political party does not make you a Christian. It has become commonly accepted in America today that if you're a Republican, you're Christian. And I'm not speaking for or against Republicanism or the Democratic Party, because there are those in the Democratic Party who believe we're Christians because we're Democrats.

So we're for the poor and for the stranger and those kinds of things. But being of the right political party does not make you a Christian. Now folks, this is important, and I know you say, well yeah, we've heard you say this before.

This is very important, because this is becoming established dogma in America today, that if you're a part of a certain party, you're a Christian. And you say, well brother, you don't have scripture for it. Yes, I do have scripture.

Because remember that in the New Testament time, there were four political parties, and then you touch on the two important ones, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. They were political parties with a theological background. In other words, they believed certain things concerning the Bible, and they were political, the same way as we have today.

So just to make it plain, Democrats have a certain theology that's connected to their Democratic views. Republicans have a certain theology which is connected to those views. And the Sadducees were political animals, and a political party, but with theological underpinnings.

And the same with the Pharisees. Now if you asked Paul when he was unsaved, are you saved, obviously understanding New Testament terminology and the Old Testament, he'd say, yeah. Why? Because I'm a Pharisee.

Because I'm a Pharisee. And in fact in Philippians chapter 3 verse 5, he gives his credentials. He says, this is who I was, and I thought that this was what made me right with God.

I was circumcised on the eighth day. Now today we would compare that with baptism, and I'm going to touch on baptism in a moment. So I was baptized in our language.

I was circumcised on the eighth day. That made me right with God. I was a stock of Israel.

I was born a Jew. I was born American. I was born free.

I was born British. Not only was I the stock of Israel, I was of the tribe of Benjamin. I was of the smallest and best of all the tribes.

A Hebrew of the Hebrews. Today we would say I bled red, white, and blue. I was a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

I was an American of the Americans. Then he says concerning the law, a Pharisee. These were his claims to being right with God.

And yet he comes to the point and he says these things were rubbish. He uses the word dung, manure. Because I came to understand that there's only one that saves, and that's Jesus Christ.

It's not my ethnicity. It's not my nationality. It's not my political affiliation.

It's not even my doctrine. It's Jesus alone that saves. The next thing is that we believe that we are baptized, which I just touched on a moment ago.

In Luke chapter 3 they come to John, and obviously I understand that there's a difference between John's baptism and Christian baptism, but that's not germane here. So John says to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him. So they're coming to be baptized.

Brood of vipers, snakes, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance and do not begin to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. There's the theme again. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

So John says baptism is not going to save you. He says because you've come with a wrong attitude. You've come with a wrong heart.

Relative to our dedication this morning, there are those who believe they are Christians because they're born into a Christian family. Now this is becoming a bigger and bigger problem as we have 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th generation Christians. As you know I'm a 4th generation preacher.

So my family have been genuine born again Christians for 4 generations. That does not make me a Christian. And unfortunately our children are raised to believe that they are Christians because they were raised in a Christian home.

We thank God for Christian homes. And yes I do believe that being raised in a Christian home gives our children an opportunity, a chance to be exposed to the gospel. But they still need to find Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.

But the problem is that we so easily give to them the impression you're okay because you've learned to do all the right things. You've learned to behave the Christian way. You've learned to speak the Christian way.

You know the Bible. I'm going to come back to that. You may even be baptized.

But you are not born again. I think it was Billy Graham who said that God doesn't have grandchildren. He only has children.

And each one of us must come to a personal relationship with Jesus. You cannot be saved on the grounds of your parents. I'm not speaking to the children so much as I'm speaking to parents this morning.

Particularly as we come to dedicate the children. Be careful to give your children the impression that they are Christians when they are not. I've spoken before about the problem with assimilation.

Assimilation is when people come from other countries and we expect them to be assimilated into American culture. So they need to learn the culture. They need to learn the language.

And after 20 years you can hear I still haven't learned the language. And so we have Christian assimilation. People grow up in Christianity.

People join churches. They learn the language. They learn the behavior.

They learn the culture. They learn the traditions. And they're accepted to be one of us.

But in fact they are not born again. Matthew chapter 3 verse 9. Do not think that you say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

So not only were they claiming, when they were saying we have Abraham as our father, they were claiming ethnicity. But they were also claiming that they were his descendants. And because of Abraham's faith, remember Abraham is justified by faith, because of Abraham's faith we're saved.

We're saved because we're Abraham's children. In fact elsewhere Jesus says, you're of your father the devil. You may be ethnically, you may be genetically Abraham's children, but faith-wise you're not.

And so being born into a Christian family does not save us. Oh, we know the Bible. Well, I don't think anyone knows the Bible better than the devil.

Remember that right back in the first book in Genesis. He quotes from the Bible. I know this may be a shock, but there are many preachers preaching the Bible from pulpits this morning who are not born again.

The fact that you know the Bible doesn't save. The Pharisees knew the Bible. They could quote it verse by verse.

Many of them could quote the whole, they could rehearse, they knew the Old Testament off by heart from beginning to end. And in John chapter 5, we saw this verse recently in a different context, but you search the Scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life. And these are they which testify of me.

No one knew the Bible. Folks, here's the thing. I don't know that I know the Bible as well as those guys knew the Bible.

Because they were devoted to it. 24 hours a day debating it, arguing it, studying it, comparing this one, this Scripture with that Scripture. You just needed to quote a few words, and they would immediately recognize exactly what the rest of the passage said.

Jesus says you search the Scriptures because you think that you're saved by studying the Scriptures. But he says the point of the Scriptures is not for you to get saved. The point of the Scriptures is to bring you to me, because I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

But he says you are not willing to come to me that you may have life. So for all the understanding and knowledge of the Scriptures, they still did not have Jesus. And folks, when I listen to preachers today, they know all sorts of things about the Bible, but they don't know Jesus.

And so knowing the Bible does not save us. Praying does not save us. Now I know this is all familiar territory to most of us, but we need to reestablish these truths because they are so easily forgotten.

In Matthew chapter 6 verse 7, When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. Who were the heathen Jesus was referring to here? The scribes and Pharisees, the religious people, and he calls them heathen. He says don't use empty words.

In other words, all of their prayers, and they would pray seven times a day, and all those prayers, he says, is just empty. It's worthless. He says because they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Now let me just re-emphasize this. All of these things are good and right and important. It's important that we believe.

It's important that we are a member of the church. It's important that we stand against morality. It's important that we are baptized.

It's important that we are born, or it helps to be born in a Christian family. It certainly helps to raise our children in a Christian context. It's important to know the Bible.

It's important to pray. But none of those things save. Now the final of the bad news, and then I'll get to the good news.

Matthew chapter 7 verse 21, which we read, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. The last, and I don't remember how many points I've got of these points, of what is not a Christian, is that the fact that you claim to be a Christian does not make you a Christian. I can claim to be a woman as much as I like.

It doesn't change who I am. I'm a man. I was born that way.

I look that way. I behave that way. These days we're taught to believe that you can be whatever you want to be.

You can claim whatever you want. You can claim to be a fairy. You can claim to be Superman.

You can claim to be whatever. And, folk, we're living in a time when everybody claims to be a Christian. I don't know that there, I know there's a couple of Muslims on Capitol Hill.

They may be one or two atheists, but the vast majority of those who sit in the Senate and in Congress claim to be Christians. And I can tell you now that very few of them are. You can claim what you like.

It doesn't change who you are. And that's the problem. It goes back to the outward washing of the cup.

You can try and put on the language. You can try and act the right way. You can have the right philosophy.

You can have the right morality. But if your heart hasn't been changed, nothing has changed. And so they'll say, Lord, Lord.

So they're acknowledging Jesus as their Lord, as their Master. Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father. He who does the will of my Father.

So now, what then is a Christian? And of course, I have 10 minutes left to try and cover a subject that needs 10 months. And I trust that in these recent years, over these years, we've covered many of these things. But of course, the first thing is that I need to believe.

John 3, verse 16, For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This is not believing like the demons believe. This is not believing like those who claim to be Christians and are not believe.

Because what they believe is not real. They don't really believe. I think I've shared with you that when I was younger and more foolish, I used to hang-glide.

And we would sit on the side of the mountain waiting for the right wind. And it was a great opportunity just to shoot the breeze and talk, and people would come and watch as you fly. And it was a favorite conversation starter that I would have.

I would say, well, do you believe that this piece of plastic flies? Oh, yeah, yeah, we believe. We can see. Guys are flying.

All right, well, let me strap you in. And then you go. No, no, no, no, no.

Did they believe? No, they did not believe. Because if they believed, they would allow you to strap them in and to throw them off the mountain. It's one thing to say you believe.

It's another thing to put your trust totally in that thing. And when we say we believe on the Lord Jesus, it means that we put our confidence not in our ethnicity, not in our religion, not in our morality, not in our knowledge of the scriptures, but in Jesus Christ and in him alone. That is biblical faith.

But remember we saw that James says that faith without works is dead. And that's the problem. So it's no good saying, well, I believe, but you won't jump off the mountain.

It's no good saying, I believe, but you won't do what Jesus tells you to do. In fact, just remember, if we go back to Matthew chapter 7, not everyone who says, Lord, Lord. So they believed, will enter the kingdom.

But he who does the will of my father. Faith must result in works. And the first work that faith produces is repentance.

Again this week, somebody sent me a YouTube and said, you've got to listen to, watch this guy, he's really good. And he was saying, as long as you believe, there is no such thing as repentance. Repentance simply means to change your mind about who Jesus is.

Repentance is not just changing your mind. Repentance is changing your actions. And Paul, giving a summary of his ministry, says, I declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the regions of Judea, in other words, Jews, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.

You see, if repentance is just a change of mind, then what does Paul say they need to do works befitting repentance? Remember John, when they came to be baptized by him, he says, do the works of

repentance. Repentance is something that we do, it's not something, just something that we believe. And I've said before that repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of heart, that leads to a change of behavior.

And if there's no change of behavior, there is no repentance. We cannot continue in our sinful lifestyle and say we have repented. And you cannot continue in a sinful lifestyle and say you've believed, because if you believed, you will repent, and repentance means you will change the way you live.

It's as simple as that. And yet that doctrine is under tremendous attack in churches today. As long as you believe, you can live any old way, you can do whatever you like.

No, we cannot. Faith without works is dead. There needs to be a change in the way that we live.

My last point, Matthew 7, verse 20. Therefore, by their fruits, this is the passage we started with, by their fruits you will know them. Remember the context was, you know a tree by its fruit.

This time of the year, it doesn't matter how little you know about agriculture and about trees, but every one of us sees and recognizes an orange tree this time of the year, because they're all over the neighborhood, bright red, orange oranges. That's how you know. Jesus says that's how you know a Christian.

By their fruits, you will know them. It's not by their speech, it's not by their culture, it's not by their traditions, it's not by what they know, it's not by what they say, it's what they produce. What is coming out of their lives? Verse 21 of Matthew 7, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, same words that the virgins used, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.

He who does the will of my Father in heaven. So really the question at the end of the day is not, so much do you believe, but are you being obedient? Are you being obedient? Now remember that you can't put the cart before the horse, saying, well, I'm doing all these things, so that's proof of my obedience. That has to come from a change of heart.

That's where it needs to begin. But here's the problem, here's the disconnect. There are those who say they believe, but there is no action.

And then there are those who have action, but they don't believe. I need to believe, and that needs to lead to a change in action. Father, we thank you for your word.

Lord, these are simple things. They are things that we have spoken about so many times in the past, and yet, Lord, it's important that we reaffirm them, because these ideas are so much being assaulted today in our society. Everyone believes that they're a Christian for whatever reason, and yet they're not.

So, Lord, I pray that you would help us to examine our own hearts. Lord, for each one of us who are seated here this morning, those who are watching online, those who will be watching later on, I pray, Lord, that you'd help us to be honest with ourselves and to look at the fruit and say, What is my life really producing? Is it producing those things that are evidence of a changed life? Or is my life producing evidence of an unchanged life? Lord, I pray that you'd help us to be honest with ourselves. Lord, help us to make the changes that we need to make if we do need to make a change.

Lord, it's easy to be deceived, and it's easy to deceive ourselves. Lord, we remember that the way is broad, and there are many who go down that road, but the end of that way is destruction. Help us, Lord, to

be those who find the narrow way, have a right and a real relationship with the Lord Jesus, and to live the life that flows from that relationship.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Pray, Lord, that you'd continue with us as we continue in the rest of the service. And for those who are watching online, Lord, we pray that you would bless them and keep them and bring them back together to join us again online on Thursday.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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