**Is the term “Christian” understood in our culture today?**

The 5 pillars of the Protestant Reformation are:

***Sola Scriptura – by Scripture alone***

***Sola Gratia – by Grace alone***

***Solo Christus – by Christ alone***

***Sola Fide – by Faith alone***

***Soli Deo Gloria – Glory to God alone***

Postmodernism is a movement that focuses on the reality of the individual, denies statements that claim to be true for all people and is often expressed in a pared-down style in arts, literature and culture.

* It is highly likely that many people in churches actually believe that the Christian faith is like Moralistic Therapeutic Deism or MTD.
* The five core beliefs of MTD are as follows:

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

Now, both ‘the house of God’ and ‘the flock of God’ refer to the church that Jesus purchased with His own blood.

We can see from these references in 1 Peter 4:16 – 5:2 that one who is a Christian is one that has obeyed the gospel and is part of God’s church.

That gospel was first proclaimed by the apostles on the Day of Pentecost: “*Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” (Acts 2:36–38, ESV)

At the very start of His ministry in the first words recorded in Mark’s gospel we see Jesus said, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*” (Mark 1:15, ESV)

Again, in John’s gospel Jesus answered a question about priorities with: “*Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”*” (John 6:29, ESV)

Jesus declares the priority of this gospel: “*And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*” (Matthew 24:14, ESV)

Jesus message included two action steps to take in response to His gospel.

The first step was to repent. The second was to believe in the gospel. [Mark 1:15] “*and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*” (Mark 1:15, ESV)

The kind of belief that Jesus urges us to have is a commitment that is clearly demonstrated by the way we live. Jesus was asking the people of the first century – and us today – to comprehend His message, trust it and act accordingly.

So – ‘to believe in the gospel’ as Jesus instructed us to do, includes having the knowledge that He is the prophesied Messiah, repenting of our sins, trusting in Him as our Saviour and then continuing to live in obedience to His commands as He is our Lord and Master. The belief that Jesus advocated was not only a matter of knowledge.

The point is that when we truly believe the gospel Jesus preached, our entire lives are devoted to this cause.

So, the key concept we must note is that believing in the gospel is an all-in-commitment.

Jesus gave a sobering reminder in Mark 16:16: “*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*” (Mark 16:16, ESV)

The kind of response to the gospel that both Jesus and the apostles asked for is not a simple accepting of the reality of Jesus as a good man, as a great healer, and a wonderful teacher, as a good example or even as a sacrifice for sin. The kind of response that Jesus and the apostles required to the gospel is a sense of our own utter helplessness and an active trust in Christ’s righteousness to our account and a power to transform us from being fallen individuals to being transformed individuals in His likeness.

Listen to how the apostle Paul put it: “*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*” (Romans 6:17–18, ESV)

That this is an entire human lifetime of commitment following repentance and faith is clearly taught in Philippians: “*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,* *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*” (Philippians 2:12-13, ESV)

That this affects all of our life in visible and invisible ways is found in Paul’s admonition to Timothy: “*Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*” (1 Timothy 4:12, ESV)

So what are the conclusions and applications?

**First** and foremost, a Christian is a person who has obeyed the gospel. That means that there are a lot of people who THINK that they are Christians who are not.

So let me stop for a moment and ask a very sobering question. Have you obeyed the gospel? Have you recognized who Jesus is, what He did on the cross of Calvary for your sins? Have you recognized that all your righteousness is as filthy rags and carries no ability to influence a Holy and Righteous God to accept you into His presence? Have you repented before God for your sinfulness and believed in His Son as your atonement for your sins and given your life into His hands as your Saviour and Lord?

Friend – you may have been in church all your life from a baby, but if you have not obeyed the gospel you are not a Christian.

You need to get saved! You need to repent and believe AND confess it publicly. And you need to reprioritize the direction of your life.

**Secondly**, it means that we must stop assuming that because a person in our sphere of influence is somewhat religious, has said that they once prayed a prayer to receive Jesus, that they believe in God or even that they go to church that they are truly a Christian. While we can not exercise a judgement as to their salvation, we can certainly exercise some discernment as to whether there is any of the clear fruit that both Jesus and the apostles expected came with true belief and we can tailor our prayers for them and our witnessing to them on the basis of their perceived genuine spiritual need. So, don’t assume that someone is a saved person, a true Christian if there is no public profession of it and also if there is no clear biblically evaluated signs of their conversion.

**Third**, perhaps we should return to describing ourselves like the people in Antioch as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ – and let people call us Christians because they see and hear our Christocentric focus in who we are and what we do.

Is the word Christian understood culturally or biblically in our world surrounding us? Clearly it is understood culturally on the basis of an individual’s heredity and environment and teaching.

It is clearly up to us to help people know what the true meaning of Christian is.