
Church members like Americans can not be adequately described or categorized by the single word "Christian". You know the confusion that exist on what it is to be a Christian, and we must turn to the Bible, our sole criterion for faith and practice, to find the different categories of Christians. I am sure you would expect the list of the categories of Christians to be much larger than one. Even to describe the uniqueness of Americans, it takes far more than the single word American to try to describe all of them. Most are familiar with the question about categories on job applications where you must, if you desire, identify yourself as Afro-American, Latin American, Indian American, Caucasian, and so on. While we can find many categories of Christians in the teachings of the Bible, we will try to focus on six broad categories. These are (1) attendees, (2) listeners, (3) learners, (4) disciples, (5) departers, and (6) friends of Jesus.

1-1: Attenders. (Perhaps proper English demands the word "attendees".)

Attendance is good. It is half of the Bible admonition to "forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, but exhort one another while it is still called today". We might question how good attendance is when there is not the other half of the admonition to exhort one another, to exhort on God, Christ, and the sound doctrine of the Bible. However, you would have to admit that when you weigh the emphasis that the Bible places on church attendance with the current emphasis in churches, there is a disparity. Only once in the Bible is it mentioned to assemble yourselves together in church attendance, and again that is only half of the admonition; and yet you can not number the times each Sunday on forms and vocally do you hear about

church attendance. One would almost think that church attendance is a criterion for going to heaven, and yet no where in the Bible does it teach that your place in heaven will be secured by the number of days you attend church in the year.

I think as you look at the categories of Christians to follow, you will agree that the lowest level of a Christian is one who attends only. Only in the simple case of the widow who in giving her mite gave all that she could, and only in the case of Jesus' prescribed remembrance for the woman that anointed Him with oil, showing faith are there a very few church members with only the capability to attend and listen.

1-2: Listeners.

The second category of Christians of Listeners is also good in that we know from the Bible that "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Listening can be the very beginning of faith in God, Christ, and the sound doctrine of the Bible; however again we must widen the canopy of our Bible understanding in that it must be the hearing of the Word of God. There is a lot of Bible teaching and preaching today, especially in the itching ears classification, that is about the Bible instead of Bible itself.

One scripture from Pastor James, pastor of the first church at Jerusalem, who wrote as part of the Word of God, "Be not hearers of the Word only, but doers also." It is not simply hearers of the Word only who call themselves Christians that will experience salvation, but also doers of the Word. Like the military saying, "It is necessary not only to talk the talk but also to walk the walk."

1-3: Learners.

During this time of the Falling Away in the world, the real challenge of our generation, there is no more critical verses of the Bible for us to focus on than those of Ephesians 4:4-6 where we are told the proper way to learn Christ. First of all, did you know that there is a proper way and then there is an improper way to Learn Christ. Of course, we must add that the improper way to learn Christ is to learn a Christ that is not the Christ of the Bible, the Son of God. If you are already a listener to the Bible, then listen to the words of Ephesians 4:4-6:

"But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus..." (Ephesians 4:20,21)

I am amazed at the number of people who will not talk Bible. How can there be something real in the life of a person who will not even talk about Jesus, God, and the Bible? Almost as equally amazing is the number of people who call themselves Bible believers, who are not aware of the many times in the Bible where the salvation of Christians is questioned like here in Ephesians 4:20,21. What a lot of nerve? Who does the Bible think it is to question where we are in the category of Christians that is called learners of Christ? Perhaps, these verses like all the

other verses of the 66 books of the Bible are the Word of God? Yes; and it tells us a proper way and an improper way to learn Christ.

First the improper way to learn Christ is given by a exegesis of the verses of Ephesians 4 just before these verses of 20 and 21. We can summarize Ephesians 4:17-19 with teachings like this: (1) you can not live, walk, act, and think like the Gentiles Americans around you; (2) the thinking of most Americans is distorted, the Bible calls it "the futility of the mind"—what they think is so right about their life and decisions is useless and futile; (3) the understanding of most Americans, church members or otherwise in this time of the Falling Away, is darkened—what they consider as light for the paths to follow is truly darkness; (4) they are alienated from God as they would not retain God in the thinking long ago or because they are departers with an evil heart of unbelief in departing form the living God; (5) all of these bad characteristics of Gentile Americans come out of ignorance of the things of God, but it is more a blindness of the heart, what they want to believe and think, even more than a mental ignorance; and (6) many of your fellow American Gentiles and Gentiles church members having slid after 40 or more years into the Falling Away, have the famous seared conscience that make them past feeling, placing themselves in the category of church members with a form of godliness only as Paul enumerated in II Timothy 3:1-9.

The proper way to learn Christ is given throughout the Bible time and time again; but perhaps the easiest to understand in from Jesus Himself as recorded in John 14 where Jesus answered three questions from three of His Apostles. The three answers give us both an adequate understanding of what it is to properly Learn Christ, and what it is to experience real salvation. The first question from the Apostle Thomas. He asks of Jesus, "how can we know the way to God and heaven?" Jesus replied with the answer that most have heard: **"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father except through Me."**

There is no other way to heaven and God, for salvation, except through Christ. That is the way God wants it, that is the way God planned it, and that is the way in the final analysis that it will be!

The second question was from Philip. Philip asked Jesus, "Show us what God is like and we will be satisfied." Isn't this the key question that mankind has always asked, "What is God like, what does God expect of me, or what are the teachings of God."

And although many wise in this world and even claiming to be wise on religion and the Bible still seek to know what God is like, Jesus answered this question once and for all for us. The answer is there in the Bible, in the Word of God, of John 14. It is sufficient. The answer of Jesus was and still is, "The person who has seen me has seen the Father." Jesus stated that He and the Father and One: to see Jesus is to see God and to see God is to see the Father. Jesus further amplified that all the teachings and other works that He did and taught here on earth came from God the

Father. Jesus did not operate independently of God the Father. He repeated what the Father taught Him and He did what the Father told Him to do.

And then with the third question and answer from Jesus we come right down to the nitty-gritty of what it is to properly learn Christ. Remember what Paul wrote, if you heard Him and were taught by Him. Well, the Apostle Judas, not Iscariot, asked Jesus also there in John 14 and in the Garden asked Jesus, "How will you manifest yourself to us and not to the rest of the world?" Is not it true that the manifestation of Jesus to an individual believer is the equivalent of hearing Jesus and being taught by Jesus? Certainly it is, and you will see that in the context of the answer of Jesus.

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.'" (John 14:23)

1-4: Disciples.

Most people are aware that to be a learner of Christ is also to be a disciples of Christ. That is what Disciples of Christ are. They are continuing learners after Christ. Disciples are dedicated learners after Christ, those that have established a habitual habit of being daily with Jesus and learning more about His ways as well as of God the Father; and that seek constantly to do and know His will. We need no think of disciples as only applying to the 12 Apostles, who indeed were chosen to be unique writers of NT scriptures; because Jesus also chose 500 other disciples and sent them also out to witness with power and the help of the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately there were 12 Disciples and one was a traitor so that we learn that status as in the church does not assure us of salvation and security from the Falling Away. Indeed we would have to say that Judas Iscariot was an example of those who look like Christians, and indeed look like dedicated Christians; but it turns out that their salvation was not a real 9 month new birth. We might liken Judas to the one in the parable of the seed and the sower who first received the seed of the Word with great joy, but it was received in the real life situation of thorns, the thorns of the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and other things. (You notice the emphasis in the parable on things.) Anytime you see one first receive the word in a church service, revival, and in person, it is natural to think that this was a marvelous conversion with a miracle of the new birth. But what does the parable of the seed and the sower as told by Jesus tell us? It says later in the life of this disciple after cares of this world, deceitfulness of riches, and other things, they choked out the seed. So it was with Judas; and so it is today with a much larger number of Christians, even the majority, that have become victims of the Great Apostasy called the Falling Away.

1-5: Departers.

So we come to the departees or departers. Once again, it is not a Falling Away from church and church membership as these departees look like real Disciples even as Judas did right up to the final Lord's Supper. It is clearly according to Hebrews 3:12 a falling away or departure from God, Christ, and the Bible. Listen to Hebrews 3:12.

“Beware, brethren (notice that Christians are being addressed here...beware brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.” (Hebrews 3:12)

God thinks a lot different about what is evil than does President Bush or perhaps differently than most people. Whereas murder, adultery, and covetousness might be considered bad evil, what God considers as really evil is a heart of unbelief. Yes, all you must do is have a lack in your heart of faith or belief to be seen as evil in the sight of God; and this evil is so bad that it causes a wound in your inward life that causes you slowly to depart away from faith in the living God. Of course, we must also remember that those in the book of Hebrews about whom Paul was writing, the Hebrews rescued from Egyptian bondage, had seen the works of God for their benefit over 40 years before they actually fell from eternal rest. It is not easy to depart from the living God, after the living God has fed you and cloth you and given you guidance for over 40 years. It takes a positive effort of unbelief; and that is the prime evil that leads so many, Christians and otherwise, away from the sure salvation of God. **{If you mistakingly think this departure from the living God, clearly taught in Scripture, is contrary to the Security of the Believer, it is not! Both the Falling Away and the Security of the Believer are mutually solid and sound doctrines of the Bible. Wherein then is the reconciliation of the two, in the parable of the seed and the sower where some hearers of the Word, and even disciples apparently, have the seed snatched away by Satan before there is a real 9 month new birth, or the thorns or stony ground or wayside soil cause stumbling and lack of root also before the 9 month new birth is complete. Most common is that among thorns where the Gospel of Prosperity of cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and other things choke out the word of faith. For more on this, please read the SunGrist_Bible teaching commentary entitled SNATCHING, STUMBLING, AND THE FALLING AWAY.}**

1-6: Friends of Jesus.

Some time during the 40 or so years of being a church member in the learner and disciples category, a Christian either becomes a departee or a Friend of Jesus. Look at the hundreds of disciples of Christ in our churches that have gone from being mere attendees, listeners, and learners to a point of dedication or lack of dedication where they face the two paths of either being a Friend of Jesus or a departee from the living God.

Volume 3: Believe and Be Baptized

After Judas was gone, Jesus told the remaining 11 Apostles that He no longer called them disciples but friends, primarily because they understood His purpose in the world and the nature of the kingdom that He established. And what we find in the context of John 14 is that there are several requirements for being a friend of Jesus that He mentions in John 14: (1) we must love Jesus and God; (2) we must keep the commandments of Jesus; (3) we must remain dependent on Jesus through listening to His words in the Bible and through prayer to God the Father that goes through Jesus, like the branch must remain attached to the Vine in order to live and grow; and (4) we must understand the purpose for which Jesus came into the world, the nature of His kingdom, and how to participate in extension of the influence of Jesus in the world. In other words, we truly become Christians as we think and do like Jesus. We then can be honored by Jesus by hearing Him saying, "Well, done you good and faithful servant, you are a Friend of Jesus."