



Are All “Christians” Christian?

HOW many Christians are there? According to the *Atlas of Global Christianity*, in 2010 there were almost 2.3 billion worldwide. But the same publication also indicates that those Christians belong to over 41,000 denominations—each with its own doctrines and rules of conduct. Faced with this bewildering array of “Christian” religions, it is understandable that some observers become confused or even disillusioned. They may wonder, ‘Are all who claim to be Christians really Christian?’

Let us look at the matter from a different perspective. A traveler is usually required to state his citizenship to a border official. He also needs to prove that he is who he claims to be by producing some identification, perhaps a passport. Similarly, a true Christian needs to do more than profess his faith in Christ. He needs to have additional identification. What would that be?

The term “Christian” first came into use sometime after 44 C.E. The Bible historian Luke reported: “It was first in Antioch

that the disciples were by divine providence called Christians.” (Acts 11:26) Note that those called Christians were Christ’s disciples. What makes a person a disciple of Jesus Christ? *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* explains: “Following Jesus as a disciple means the unconditional sacrifice of [one’s] whole life . . . for the whole of his life.” A true Christian, therefore, is one who follows the teachings and instructions of Jesus, the Founder of Christianity, totally and unconditionally.

Is it possible to find such people among the many who profess to be Christians today? What did Jesus himself say would identify his true followers? We invite you to consider how the Bible answers these questions. In the following articles, we will examine five statements by Jesus that characterize and help to identify his true followers. We will consider how the first-century Christians measured up. And we will endeavor to see who among the many professing to be Christians today fit the pattern.

“Remain in My Word”

“If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”—JOHN 8:31, 32.

What It Means: Jesus’ “word” means his teachings, which came from a higher source. “The Father himself who sent me has given me a commandment as to what to tell and what to speak,” said Jesus. (John 12:49) In prayer to his heavenly Father, Jehovah God, Jesus said: “Your word is truth.” He frequently quoted God’s Word to support his teachings. (John 17:17; Matthew 4:4, 7, 10) True Christians, therefore, ‘remain in his word’—that is, they accept God’s Word, the Bible, as “truth” and the ultimate authority for their beliefs and practices.

How Early Christians Measured Up: The most prolific Christian Bible writer, the apostle Paul, shared Jesus’ respect for God’s Word. He wrote: “All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial.” (2 Timothy 3:16) Men appointed to teach fellow Christians had to “hold fast to the sure and trustworthy Word of God.” (Titus 1:7, 9, *The Amplified Bible*) Early Christians were admonished to reject “the philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary things of the world and not according to Christ.”—Colossians 2:8.

Who Fit the Pattern Today?: According to the Vatican’s *Dogmatic Constitution on Di-*

vine Revelation, adopted in 1965 and quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “It is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the [Catholic] Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.” An article in *Maclean’s* magazine quoted a minister in Toronto, Canada, who asked: “Why do we need a ‘revolutionary’ voice from two millennia ago to guide us? We have fabulous ideas of our own, that are constantly weakened by having to tie them back to Jesus and Scripture.”

Regarding Jehovah’s Witnesses, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* states: “They regard the Bible as their only source of belief and rule of conduct.” Recently, a man in Canada interrupted one of Jehovah’s Witnesses as she was introducing herself. “I know who you are,” he said, pointing at her Bible, “by your signature.”



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“No Part of the World”

“The world has hated them, because they are no part of the world.”—JOHN 17:14.

What It Means: Being no part of the world, Jesus was neutral in the social and political conflicts of the day. “If my kingdom were part of this world,” he explained, “my attendants would have fought that I should not be delivered up to the Jews. But, as it is, my kingdom is not from this source.” (John 18:36) He also urged his followers to shun attitudes, speech, and conduct condemned in God’s Word.—Matthew 20:25-27.

How Early Christians Measured Up: According to religion writer Jonathan Dymond, the early Christians “refused to engage in [war]; whatever were the consequences, whether reproach, or imprisonment, or death.” They chose to suffer rather than compromise their neutral stand. Their moral code also set them apart. Christians were told: “Because you do not continue running with them in this course to the same low sink of debauchery, they are puzzled and go on speaking abusively of you.” (1 Peter 4:4) Historian Will Durant wrote that Christians

“were troubling the pleasure-mad pagan world with their piety and their decency.”

Who Fit the Pattern Today? Regarding Christian neutrality, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* asserts: “Conscientious objection is morally indefensible.” An article in the *Reformierte Presse* states that a report by African Rights, a human rights organization, on the 1994 Rwandan genocide established the participation of all churches, “with the exception of Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

Discussing the Nazi Holocaust, a high-school teacher lamented that “no group or organization of regular citizens spoke out against the mass of lies, cruelty, and eventual atrocities.” After consulting with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, he wrote: “I now had my answer.” He learned that Jehovah’s Witnesses stood firm in their beliefs in spite of the harsh treatment they received.

What about their moral code? “The majority of today’s young adult Catholics disagree with church teachings on issues like cohabitation [and] premarital sex,” says *U.S. Catholic* magazine. The journal quotes a church deacon, who said: “A great percentage I see—I’d guess it’s well over 50 percent—are already living together when they come to be married.” *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* observes that Jehovah’s Witnesses “insist upon a high moral code in personal conduct.”

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“Have Love Among Yourselves”

“I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves.”—JOHN 13:34, 35.

What It Means: Christ told his followers to love one another the way that he loved them. How did Jesus love them? His love transcended the national and gender bias prevalent in his day. (John 4:7-10) Love moved Jesus to sacrifice his time, energy, and personal comfort in order to help others. (Mark 6:30-34) Finally, Christ showed love in the greatest way possible. “I am the fine shepherd,” he said. “The fine shepherd surrenders his soul in behalf of the sheep.”—John 10:11.

How Early Christians Measured Up: In the first century, Christians called each other “brother” or “sister.” (Philemon 1, 2) People of all nations were welcomed into the Christian congregation, for they believed that “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for there is the same Lord over all.” (Romans 10:11, 12) After Pentecost 33 C.E., the disciples in Jerusalem “went selling their possessions and properties and distributing the proceeds to all, just as anyone would have the need.” For what purpose? So that those newly baptized could remain in Jerusalem and continue “devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles.” (Acts 2:41-45) What motivated such actions? Less than 200 years after the death of the apostles, Tertullian quoted what others said of Christians: “How they love one another . . . and how they are ready even to die for one another.”

Who Fit the Pattern Today? The book *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1837) observed that over the centuries those who professed to be Christians

“have inflicted far greater severities on each other, than they had experienced from the zeal of infidels [unbelievers].” A recent U.S. study found a strong link between religious people—most of whom identified themselves as Christian—and racial bias. Churchgoers in one land are often unaffiliated with those of the same denomination in another land and are thus unable or disinclined to help fellow believers when a need arises.

In 2004, after Florida was hit by a string of four hurricanes in two months, the chairman of Florida’s Emergency Operations Committee checked to ensure that their supplies were being used properly. He said that no other group was as well organized as Jehovah’s Witnesses, and he offered to provide any supplies needed by the Witnesses. Earlier, in 1997, a relief team of Jehovah’s Witnesses with medicine, food, and clothing traveled to the Democratic Republic of Congo to assist their Christian brothers and others in need. Fellow Witnesses in Europe had donated supplies totaling a million dollars (U.S.).





“I Have Made Your Name Known”

“I have made your name manifest to the men you gave me out of the world. . . . I have made your name known to them and will make it known.”

—JOHN 17:6, 26.

What It Means: Jesus made known God’s name by using it in his ministry. When Jesus read from the Scriptures, as he often did, he would have pronounced God’s personal name. (Luke 4:16-21) He taught his followers to pray: “Father, let your name be sanctified.”—Luke 11:2.

How Early Christians Measured Up: The apostle Peter related to the older men at Jerusalem that God had taken out of the nations “a people for his name.” (Acts 15:14) The apostles and others preached that “everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.” (Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13) They also used the divine name in their own writings. *The Tosefta*, a collection of Jewish laws completed by about 300 C.E., says regarding the burning of Christian writings by opposers: “The books of the Evangelists and the books of the *minim* [thought to be Jewish Christians] they do not save from a fire. But they are allowed to burn where they are, . . . they and the references to the Divine Name which are in them.”

Who Fit the Pattern Today? The *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible, authorized by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States, says in its pref-

ace: “The use of any proper name for the one and only God, as though there were other gods from whom he had to be distinguished, was discontinued in Judaism before the Christian era and is entirely inappropriate for the universal faith of the Christian Church.” Thus, it replaced the divine name with a title, “LORD.” More recently, the Vatican directed its bishops: “In songs and prayers the name of God in the form of the *tetragrammaton* YHWH* is neither to be used or pronounced.”

Who today use and make known God’s personal name? When Sergey was a teenager in Kyrgyzstan, he watched a film that identified God’s name as Jehovah. For some ten years, he did not hear the divine name again. Later, after Sergey had moved to the United States, two of Jehovah’s Witnesses visited him at his home and showed him God’s name in the Bible. Sergey was thrilled to find a group that used the name Jehovah. Interestingly, under the entry “Jehovah God,” *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* gives the definition “a supreme deity recognized and the only deity worshiped by Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

* In English, the divine name is commonly transliterated as “Jehovah.”



“This Good News of the Kingdom Will Be Preached”

“This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come.”—MATTHEW 24:14.

What It Means: The Gospel writer Luke reported that Jesus “went journeying from city to city and from village to village, preaching and declaring the good news of the kingdom of God.” (Luke 8:1) Jesus himself said: “I must declare the good news of the kingdom of God, because for this I was sent forth.” (Luke 4:43) He sent his disciples to preach the good news in the towns and villages and later commanded them: “You will be witnesses of me . . . to the most distant part of the earth.”—Acts 1:8; Luke 10:1.

How Early Christians Measured Up: Jesus’ disciples wasted no time in doing what Jesus told them. “Every day in the temple and from house to house they continued without letup teaching and declaring the good

news about the Christ.” (Acts 5:42) Preaching was not limited to an elite group. Historian Neander observed that “Celsus, the first writer against Christianity, jeer[ed] at the fact, that wool-workers, cobblers, leather-dressers, the most illiterate and vulgar of mankind, were zealous preachers of the gospel.” In his book *The Early Centuries of the Church*, Jean Bernardi wrote: “[Christians] were to go out and speak everywhere and to everyone. On the highways and in the cities, on the public squares and in the homes. Welcome or unwelcome. . . . To the ends of the earth.”

Who Fit the Pattern Today? “The church’s failure to take preaching and teaching seriously is one reason for the general spiritual



malaise of today,” writes Anglican priest David Watson. In his book *Why Are the Catholics Leaving?* José Luis Pérez Guadalupe wrote about the activities of Evangelicals, Adventists, and others and observed that “they do not go from house to house.” Regarding Jehovah’s Witnesses, he wrote: “They go systematically from house to house.”

An interesting and realistic observation made by Jonathan Turley is found in *Cato Supreme Court Review, 2001-2002*: “Mention the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and most people immediately think of preachers visiting our homes at inconvenient hours. For the Jehovah’s Witnesses, proselytizing door-to-door is not simply to advance their faith but the very article of faith.”

Do You Recognize the Mark?

Based on the Scriptural criteria discussed in this series of articles, who today, do you think, bear the mark of true Christianity? Though there are tens of thousands of groups and denominations claiming to be Christian, bear in mind what Jesus told his followers: “Not everyone saying to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of my Father who is in the heavens will.” (Matthew 7:21) Identifying those who are doing the will of the Father—thus bearing the mark of true Christianity—and associating with them can lead to eternal blessings under God’s Kingdom. We invite you to ask Jehovah’s Witnesses, who brought you this magazine, for more information about God’s Kingdom and the blessings it will bring.—Luke 4:43.

SHOULD YOU TRUST YOUR First Impressions?

WHILE sitting comfortably in his living room, a doctor was watching a television talk show that was hosting an Irish government minister. After carefully observing the minister's face, the doctor noticed something that he thought gave indication of a tumor. He advised the minister to have it checked immediately.

The diagnosis turned out to be exactly right. That doctor had what is sometimes called a clinical eye, that is, the ability to make a good diagnosis by simply looking at a patient. Some, however, feel that they have a "clinical eye" when it comes to judging people's character, personality, and trustworthiness.

Over the centuries, researchers have tried to come up with a scientific approach to the possibility of discovering a person's character by his physical appearance. They call it physiognomy, which *Encyclopædia Britannica* defines as "a pseudoscience dealing with personality traits supposedly revealed by facial features or by body structure and form." In the 19th century, anthropologists, such as Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, and criminologists, such as Cesare Lombroso of Italy, proposed similar theories and techniques that have since been mostly forgotten.

Still, many people believe that it is possible to come to a reliable judgment about an individual simply by observing his outward appearance. Are such first impressions to be trusted?

Judging by Appearance

A typical example of judging—or misjudging—by first impressions is found in the

Bible book of First Samuel. Jehovah God directed the prophet Samuel to anoint a member of Jesse's household as the future king of Israel. We read: "It came about that, as [the sons of Jesse] came in and he caught sight of Eliab, he at once said: 'Surely his anointed one is before Jehovah.' But Jehovah said to Samuel: 'Do not look at his appearance and at the height of his stature, for I have rejected him. For not the way man sees is the way God sees, because mere man sees what appears to the eyes; but as for Jehovah, he sees what the heart is.'" The same thing was repeated with six more of Jesse's sons. Finally, contrary to what the prophet and Jesse thought, God chose as future king the eighth son—David—a young lad whom no one had even thought of calling.—1 Samuel 16:6-12.

Things are not very different today. A few years ago, in Germany, a professor of criminology conducted an experiment that involved 500 law students. There were 12 unknown "guests." These included the local police commander and the local prosecutor, the university treasurer and the public relations officer, some lawyers and court officials, and three convicted criminals. The students were to determine the profession of each of the guests, as well as which of the guests had to serve a prison sentence and for what crime. All of this was to be based only on their appearance and on the hobbies they said they had.

The results? About 75 percent of the students succeeded in picking out the three real criminals. But an average of 60 percent of the students also identified as lawbreakers the nine other guests, who had a clean

record. The local prosecutor was thought to be a potential drug pusher by 1 out of 7 of the students, and the police commander was thought to be a thief by 1 out of 3 of them! Assessments based on impressions can be far off the mark. Why?

Appearances Can Be Deceptive

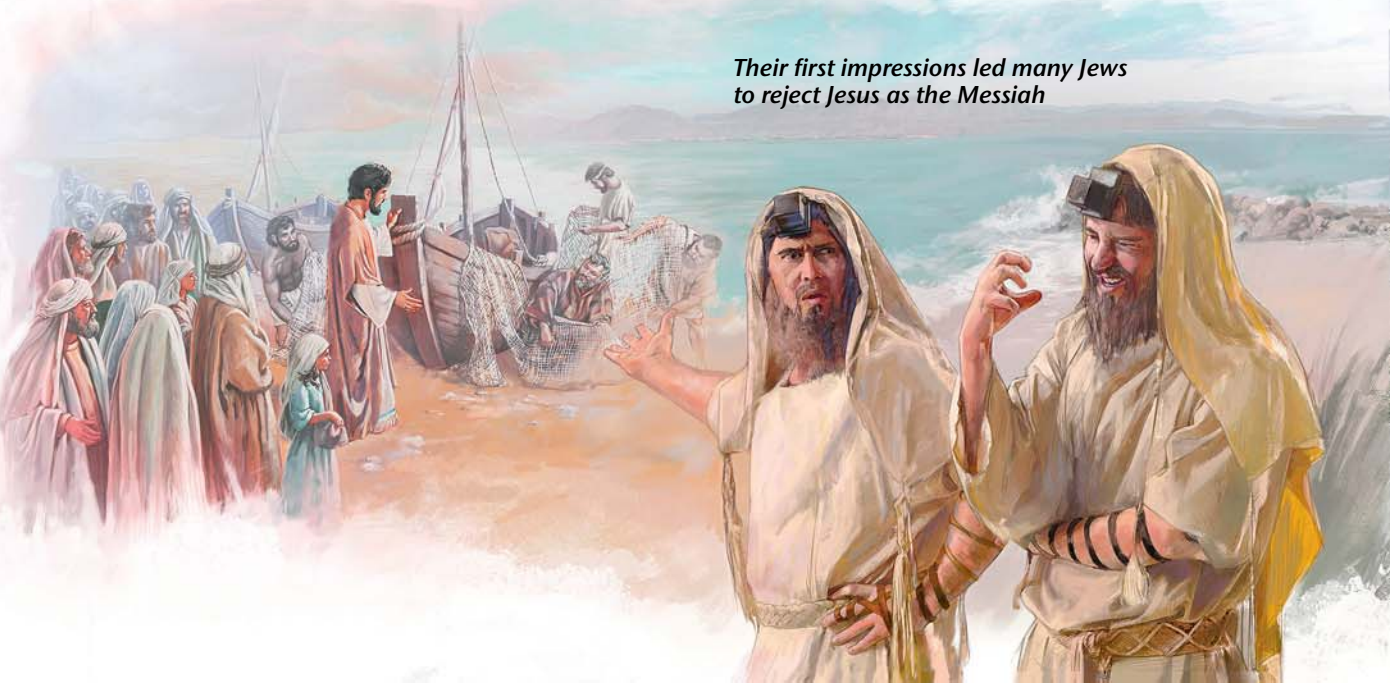
When we meet someone for the first time, we tend to formulate opinions about the person in light of our past experience. We are prone to generalize and to judge him on the basis of stereotypes. In addition to physical appearance, we may evaluate or judge the person because of his nationality, ethnicity, social standing, or religion.

If the opinion we formed of that person turns out to be correct, we congratulate ourselves on our good judgment, and our belief that we can trust our first impressions is reinforced. However, when we realize that we had come to a completely wrong conclusion, how do we react? If we are honest, we should let go of our preconceived opinion and look for the facts. Otherwise, we might be doing others a great disservice or even serious wrong, all because of our pride in exercising what we consider to be our superior sense of judgment.

Judging by appearance can be harmful not only for the victim but also for the one doing the judging. For example, in the first century, many Jews refused to consider the possibility that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Why? Basing their opinions on outward appearances, all they saw was the son of a country carpenter. Although they were impressed by Jesus' wise words and powerful works, they refused to believe that he could be anything more than what they had already decided, based on their preconceived ideas. Their attitude caused Jesus to turn his attention elsewhere, saying: "A prophet is not unhonored except in his home territory and in his own house."—Matthew 13:54-58.

Those Jews were members of a nation that had been awaiting the Messiah for centuries. To allow their first impressions to prevent them from recognizing the Messiah when he finally arrived led to a grave loss spiritually. (Matthew 23:37-39) Similar prejudices were directed at Jesus' followers. Many people simply could not believe that a small group of lowly fishermen, despised by the educated class and the leaders of the dominant religion, could have anything important to say. Those who continued to trust in their first impressions lost out on the

Their first impressions led many Jews to reject Jesus as the Messiah



splendid opportunity of becoming followers of God's Son.—John 1:10-12.

Some Changed Their Mind

There were some contemporaries of Jesus who were humble enough to change their mind when faced with the evidence. (John 7:45-52) Included among these were several of Jesus' family members, who at first had not taken seriously the possibility that one of their relatives could be the Messiah. (John 7:5) Commendably, in time they changed their mind and put faith in him. (Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19) Similarly, years later in Rome, some representatives of the Jewish community were willing to listen to the apostle Paul in person rather than trust rumors spread by enemies of Christianity. After having listened, some of them became believers.—Acts 28:22-24.

Today, many have a negative opinion of Jehovah's Witnesses. Why? In most cases, it is not because they have examined the facts or have proved that the beliefs and practices of the Witnesses are unscriptural. Rather, they simply cannot believe that Jehovah's Witnesses could have the truth in the reli-

gious field. This, as you will recall, is exactly the same view that many in the first century had of the early Christians.

It is not surprising that unfavorable or disparaging remarks are made against those who endeavor to follow Jesus' example. Why not? Because Jesus warned his true followers: "You will be objects of hatred by all people on account of my name." But he encouraged them with the words: "He that has endured to the end is the one that will be saved."—Matthew 10:22.

In obedience to Jesus' command, Jehovah's Witnesses today work hard to bring the good news of God's Kingdom to people worldwide. (Matthew 28:19, 20) Those who flatly refuse to listen risk losing out on the opportunity of getting on the road to everlasting life. (John 17:3) What about you? Will you be guided simply by first impressions and preconceived ideas, or will you be willing to examine the facts with an open mind? Remember: Appearances can be deceptive, and impressions can be wrong; but an objective examination of the facts can result in pleasant surprises.—Acts 17:10-12.

Is your opinion of Jehovah's Witnesses based on impressions or on facts?

