

Why Are You A Christian?

John 8:48-59

BI: Christianity is not simply about accessing God's gifts, but having the privilege of knowing God's Son.

Read John 8:48-59

Introduction:

I assume since you are sitting here in church that one of two things is true of you. Either you consider yourself a Christian (follower of Christ) or you are interested in learning about what it means to be a Christian. I want to speak to those of you who consider yourselves Christians. The question that I want to ask you today is, Why? Why are you a Christian? What I mean is, what motivates you to identify with Christ and His people? Or to make the question more concrete, What do you want from God that you expect you will get as a result of being a Christian?

Now I know these sound like a strange questions because we don't like to think that we are in this for ourselves, but the reality is, we are. Each of us has come to Christ believing that God will give us something we desperately need. What is that? What do you believe you need so much that you would become a Christian to get it?

This question came to mind this week as I was studying the final section of John 8 because it seems so strange to me that the Pharisees and the leaders of the Jews were unshakably committed to their religion but when the God they claimed to worship actually showed up, they rejected Him. It made me ask, What did they want? Why did they practice Judaism? Well, one thing seems apparent: whatever they wanted, it wasn't God.

I. Why So Much Conflict?:

1. If we were doing an exhaustive bible study on the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders we could trace it back through several chapters. But for time's sake let's limit ourselves to chapter 8.
2. John tells us back in the prologue (1) that what is going on here in His gospel is that God (the Logos- the Word) became flesh (man) and offered Himself to His own people, but they rejected Him. And that's what we see here.
 - A. In 8:12 Jesus says, "I am the Light of the world: he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but have the Light of life."
 - B. How did his people respond to this offer?
 - 1) (13) They rejected his testimony.

- 2) (19) They denied that God was His Father.
- 3) (33) They declared that they didn't need Him.
- 4) (48) They insulted Him.

C. How did Jesus respond to this?

- 1) (18) My Father testifies to my identity.
- 2) (19) If you knew me you would know my Father.
- 3) (28) One day you will know who I am but it will be too late.
- 4) (42) If God were your Father, you would love me.
- 5) (54) Your God glorifies me, why don't you?

D. There are two statements here that infuriated the Jews more than anything else.

- 1) (44) Your Father is the devil
- 2) (58) Before Abraham was, I Am. (Ex. 3:14)

E. What was Jesus saying? He was saying, "I am Your God! I am the one who brought you out of Egypt. I brought you through the Red Sea. I met you on the mountain. I lead you through the desert those 40 years, and I brought you to the Promise Land. I am you God. I am the One you claim to worship.

3. As it turns out, God is not what they really wanted! They were simply using God to get other things. And that brings us to the relevant question of the morning: IF they didn't want God, what did they want?

A. They wanted the respect and honor of men.

- 1) Matt. 6:2
- 2) Matt 6:5
- 3) Matt. 6:16

B. They wanted power over people – (Matt. 23:13)

C. They wanted to get rich – (Matt. 23:14, 25)

D. In reality, they didn't want God. They simply wanted to use God to get what they really wanted. That's why Jesus said (Mk. 7:6) "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

4. You see, these religious people practiced Judaism not because they wanted God, but because they wanted things they thought they could get for themselves by associating with God.

5. But here is the point of this message this morning: As John Piper has so powerfully said: “God will not be used as currency for the purchase of idols.”¹

II. What Was Jesus Offering?:

1. I want to submit to you that what Jesus was offering to the Jewish people of His day was none other than Himself. Yes, He was offering forgiveness of sins, the removal of guilt, the gift of peace, and 10,000 other things, but we can want all of those things for the wrong reason.
2. It is possible to want forgiveness for emotional relief, but that is not the same things as wanting Jesus. “Forgiveness is precious for one final reason: it enables us to enjoy fellowship with God.”² The removal of guilt is a wonderful thing, but God give it only to those who love Him.
3. Consider this: Why do you want eternal life? It’s possible to want eternal life simply to escape the horrors of hell. But that’s not what eternal life is about. Jesus told us what eternal life is about when He said (Jn. 17:3) “This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”
4. You see, beloved, eternal life is not the essence of the gospel. Forgiveness isn’t the essence of the gospel. The removal of guilt is not the essence of the gospel. Community and freedom from loneliness is not the essence of the gospel. What is the gospel? Christ is the gospel!
5. Being a Christian brings us many precious gifts.
 - A. Freedom from the fear of death (8:51-52)
 - B. Forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:9)
 - C. Fellowship and community
 - D. Promise of eternal reward
 - E. Escape from the wrath of God in Hell
 - F. Spiritual gifts
 - G. Comfort, assurance, boldness, meaning, purpose, not to mention love, joy, peace, and 10,000 other blessings... and none of them is the gospel!
6. The gospel is Jesus Christ. Woe to us if we present the gospel merely as a system for having one’s sin forgiven and debt paid. We don’t offer the world a System (that’s what the Pharisees had, and what every other religion on the planet has. No, we don’t offer

¹ John Piper, *God In The Gospel* (Article) from the *Desiring God* website (<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-is-the-gospel>), viewed on July 24, 2014.

² Ibid.

them a system. We offer them Savior! We offer them the promise of personal relationship with God.

7. This was the central pillar of Paul's life. And he told us so when he wrote: "For to me, to live is Christ... (1:21). "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... (3:7-8).

8. So once again I ask, why are you a Christian? What do you want from God?

9. I want to conclude today by offering you a lengthy quote from Jonathan Edwards. I had it printed in the bulletin so you can take it with you to consider. Here is what Edwards said:

The redeemed have all their objective good in God. God himself is the great good which they are brought to the possession and enjoyment of by redemption. He is the highest good, and the sum of all that good which Christ purchased. God is the inheritance of the saints; he is the portion of their souls. God is their wealth and treasure, their food, their life, their dwelling place, their ornament and diadem, and their everlasting honor and glory. They have none in heaven but God; he is the great good which the redeemed are received to at death, and which they are to rise to at the end of the world. The Lord God, he is the light of the heavenly Jerusalem; and is the 'river of the water of life' that runs, and the tree of life that grows, 'in the midst of the paradise of God'. The glorious excellencies and beauty of God will be what will forever entertain the minds of the saints, and the love of God will be their everlasting feast. The redeemed will indeed enjoy other things; they will enjoy the angels, and will enjoy one another: but that which they shall enjoy in the angels, or each other, or in anything else whatsoever, that will yield then delight and happiness, will be what will be seen of God in them.³

10. At the blazing center of Christianity is not the promise of peace, or the relief of shame, or banishment of loneliness or anything else. These but small planets that find their orbit around the magnificent, life-giving center of all things; namely, Jesus Christ.

- So when you read the Bible tomorrow morning or in family worship tonight, will you be looking for God's gifts, or will you primarily be looking for God in Christ?
- And when you hear the next sermon or meet for the next bible study, will you be listen for practical truth, or will you be primarily listening for the glory of God in Christ?

³ The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999], pp. 74-75

- And when you share the gospel, will you tell people that all their problems can be resolved or that God has a wonderful plan for their life? Or will you tell them that they can be forgiven, reconciled to, and loved by God in Christ?
- And when you pray, will the focus of your prayers be the healing of physical illness or financial distress, or will the focus of your prayer be the worship, adoration, and enjoyment of God in Christ?
- And when you think and talk about your future hope of heaven, will you talk mostly about loved ones who have gone before, or pearly gates, or the New Jerusalem, or will you think and talk mostly about your longing to see Jesus in all his life-giving, grace-bestowing glory?

11. My question this morning is, Why are you a Christian? Is it so that you might enjoy God's gifts, or is it because you love Jesus Christ?

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