

# WHAT DOES A REAL CHRISTIAN LOOK LIKE?

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*By the Book*™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series  
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## Let's Begin

*I enjoy a delicious plate of spaghetti with rich, thick marinara sauce loaded down with fresh, delightful mushrooms. Nothing gets better than that. However, whenever I've strolled through the woods and seen some of the biggest, most beautiful mushrooms imaginable, I have never picked them and brought them home to spice up my spaghetti. There is a reason. No matter how beautiful they are, there is no safe way to tell the delicious ones from the deadly ones. And even the mushrooms that are not considered deadly are still notorious for causing serious allergic reactions in people. Only a person trained to tell the difference can safely identify the edible mushrooms from the poisonous ones.*

*As Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, we learned in chapter seven about a group of people who, even though they did good and decent acts in this life, when they stand before God at judgment, it will be revealed to them just how deceived they really were (7:22-27). This is sad but also sobering because it forces us to ask what a real Christian looks like. Isn't there some way to distinguish between genuine Christians and false ones, like there is to distinguish between edible mushrooms and poisonous ones? The Bible gives us an answer.*

*In chapter nine, Matthew makes it plain that there is a sure way to tell if a person is a real Christian. I'd like you to consider two truths we learn from Matthew chapter nine that show us what a real Christian looks like:*

**I. A Real Christian is a Person cleansed from Sin (vv. 1-18)**

**II. A Real Christian is a Person called to Serve (vv. 19-34)**

## I. A Real Christian is a Person Cleansed from Sin (vv. 1-18)

Only God can forgive sin. And even though the Pharisees were confused about a lot of things, not even they disputed that. What the Pharisees did not consider an option, however, is that Jesus is God. In fact, Matthew opens this chapter with a wonderful affirmation of Jesus' identity by showing what Jesus did. Immediately, we find that there is no limit to the power of Jesus Christ. There's apparently nothing He cannot do.

Nor is there a dimension where He cannot work. **Every realm—including the physical, natural and spiritual—is open to the reign of Jesus** (Matthew 28:18). As we find later in the New Testament, His power reaches into every crevice and cranny of the universe (Colossians 1:16-17). Jesus the eternal Christ, can not only create the sun and cause it to come up every morning, He can also come into a person's heart and change that person's life.

*As we consider the truth that a real Christian is a person cleansed from sin, observe three characteristics of Jesus as the only One Who can cleanse us from our sin.*

**The first characteristic of Jesus is His purpose to pardon our sin** (vv. 1-2). The Bible says Jesus came to seek and to save that which is lost (Luke 19:10). We cannot over state His purpose. He wants to pardon sin. When Jesus came to Nazareth, Matthew records that "they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, laying on a bed..." (v. 2). People followed the Lord everywhere they could. There was something about Jesus that attracted the multitudes.

Mark records a similar scene when four men bore their friend on a pallet to a house where Jesus was teaching. When they got there, the standing room only crowd kept them from getting close to Him. Their creative juices flowed so much and their faith was so strong, Mark said they broke up the roof where Jesus was teaching and lowered their sick friend down the opening (Mark 2: 1-4).



### Reflection Connection

*Do you think that Jesus Christ rules as King over all creation? Why or why not? If Jesus does reign over all, how should we account for so much evil in the world? What is the Christian hope concerning this evil world?*

The Bible is clear that people must be brought to Jesus. The men in Mark and the persons here in Matthew 9 made this plain. We find a pattern of this in the Gospels (cp. John 1: 42).

A sick man brought to Jesus by his friends is said to be a “man sick of palsy.” The palsy recorded here was a condition where the nerves collapsed and the result was his paralyzed condition. Let me say something here and I want to be very careful that you understand. This man’s sickness was caused by sin. Not all sickness is caused by sin, but according to the Bible, some sicknesses are (cp. John 5: 14; 9:2-3).

What must be kept clearly in mind is that while some sickness is caused directly by sin, ultimately all sickness is caused by sin because we live in a fallen world. *The human body and eternal soul live so close together, that they catch each the other’s diseases.* For example, it is estimated that 50% of all physical sickness is due to emotional problems.

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Most of us have heard horror stories of people whose lifestyles were so “loose” that they contracted incurable diseases that literally destroyed their bodies. Loose living brought this sickness on. You may be sowing seeds of terrible physical problems later on if you live a lifestyle free of moral restraints. Sin is acrippler; it is also a cold-blooded killer.

“And Jesus seeing their faith,” is how Matthew records Jesus’ response. All the man’s friends seemed to have had

faith that Jesus was their friend’s only hope. Do you have that same confidence in Jesus as your only hope? Upon laying His eyes upon the man, Jesus said “Son, be of good cheer.” What a tender word Jesus offers the man. He’s actually telling him to take courage. Why? Jesus is about to expose the man’s deepest need: “Thy sins be forgiven thee.”

The deepest need every person has is for their sins to be forgiven. The man understood he had a spiritual problem. Others viewed his problem as a physical one; he knew his problem to be a spiritual one. Forgiveness is an inner work. **Salvation works from the inside out.** The pardon of sin that Jesus offers not only proves *Who He is*, it proves *who we are* if we accept it through faith—real Christians.

**The second characteristic is the power of Jesus to pardon our sin** (vv. 3-7). The “scribes” were noted and respected religious leaders in Jesus’ day. Theirs was a religion of red tape. They were also some Jesus’ biggest critics. Critics are never in short demand; they are always around. In fact, it takes little to criticize. As the farmer said, “Any old vulture can find a carcass.”

For the scribes, the man in need of healing was a nobody. But even worse, they viewed Jesus as one who “blasphemes” God. The scribes mentioned in Mark ask who could forgive sins but “God only” (Mark 2:7). They were right! Only God can forgive sin. They possessed the right question, but the wrong answer! They

### Reflection Connection

*Are there any sins that God cannot forgive? Explain. What should Christians do to assist a wayward brother or sister? The scribes were religious geniuses. How could it be they just could not accept Jesus? What are the top reasons you think people today do not accept Jesus?*



### Reflection Connection

*What is the greatest thing we can do for people as an act of love for them? Are Churches wrong to have social ministries like soup kitchens or clothes closets? What should be the bottom line?*

came to a fork in road and simply made the wrong turn. Everyone comes to the same point. *A person cannot be neutral on this. Jesus won't let you be. He said if you are not with me, you against me (12: 30).*

Forgiveness is a divine matter. *Sin is always against God because it is a violation of His holy law.* King David understood this when he uttered “against Thee only have I sinned” (Psalm 51:4). A person has two choices about Jesus: Either Jesus is God and worthy to be worshipped, or He is a fraud unworthy to be followed.

Jesus asked his critics which is easier, “to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?” (v. 5). Actually, both forgiving sins and healing the body are clearly beyond human power. To have our sins forgiven is a spiritual, inward work that no person can accomplish. A person can't see the healing of the soul but the healing of the body can be seen and verified. Jesus is the One who can pardon sin, which heals the soul. In addition, He also heals the body. *The soul is healed at salvation and the body is fully healed at the resurrection.*

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What Matthew records for us is Jesus proposing a test to the religious skeptics. Jesus was saying: I will prove I can do the invisible, unverifiable healing of the heart by doing the visible healing of this man's body. Physical healing can be verified by observation. No clearer place in Scripture exists where we find Jesus bending over backwards to answer His critics.

Observe His words: “that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins” (v. 6). Jesus is the only One who has that power. *No man can forgive a person's sins except Jesus.*

**One final note here: If a person is to be forgiven, their sins must be forgiven on earth. Once a person is standing before God at the Great White Throne Judgment, it will be eternally too late (Revelation 20: 11-13).**

The man was healed and went forth praising God. That's the power Jesus displays to forgive our sin. And, a person whose sin is cleansed stands as positive proof that a person is a real Christian.

## II. A Real Christian is a Person Called to Serve (vv. 19-38)

As the crowds were consumed with observing the man Jesus had just healed, the Lord quietly moved on. As He did, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at his daily job—collecting taxes. “Follow me,” Jesus called to him (v. 9). As the chapter continues to unfold, we see the second truth unfold as well: *a real Christian is not only a person cleansed from sin, a real Christian is also a person called to serve—“follow me.”*

What was Matthew in for when he left his job and followed Jesus? We discover the capstone of chapter 9 in vv. 35-38. All the verses in-between serve as a marvelous illustration of the service to which Jesus calls all Christians.



### Reflection Connection

*Was Jesus offering a compliment when He spoke of His people being like sheep? What are the characteristics of sheep as they are like disciples?*

**First, note the compassion of the Savior** (v. 36a). Matthew records, “When he saw...” This was in the early stages of Jesus’ ministry. People surrounded Him wherever He went (cp. 8:1; 8:18, 9:8). Notice Jesus didn’t stay in just one area to minister. He went “all about the cities and villages” (v. 35).

From the populous cities of urban living to the out of the way places in the countryside, Jesus sought to touch everyone. Real Christians do not pick and choose where they will go or to whom they will minister. Like Matthew, they follow Jesus and allow Him to take the lead.

Just scanning through chapter nine gives a hint of the people Jesus loves. He loves the paralytic (vv. 1-8), the publican (v. 9), the little girl (vv. 18-19), the hopeless woman (vv. 20-22), the blind (vv. 27-31) and even those consumed by the devil’s power (vv. 32-34). There are no boundaries to the love of Jesus and He calls Christians to love those whom He loves.

Observe precisely how Jesus loved them. He was “teaching,” “preaching” and “healing.” That was the threefold ministry of Jesus.

No greater way exists to love people than to teach them the Word of God and preach the Gospel to them. In fact, *it is not too much to suggest that a person is not being loved the way Jesus loved if that person is not taught about Calvary.* Note,

also that Jesus healed “every sickness and every disease.” (v. 35). Let the modern day faith healer do that!

*No greater way exists to love people than to teach them the Word of God.*

How differently Jesus looked at people from the way the Pharisees looked at them. Jesus had compassion. They only had condemnation. How do you see people? How does your Sunday School class view people? If we could only see people through the eyes of Jesus!

Matthew says Jesus was “moved” with compassion (v. 36). This word is a very strong word which means to touch one’s deepest being. Jesus was moved by the

woman’s pain (v. 22), the leper’s loneliness (8:2), and the family’s bereavement (vv. 20-25). He never said “no” to a broken heart.

**Second, notice the condition of the sinner** (v. 36b). Jesus saw the people as “sheep without a shepherd.” No sheep can survive without a shepherd to guide it. Sheep are much too vulnerable to wild beasts and other natural dangers. In the same way, every sinner needs a Savior. That’s the lesson all of us need to hear.

Matthew uses the description “fainted.” It is a word that means “to distress” or “harass.” When Jesus saw the crowds, He viewed them as mistreated and harassed by both government and religion. Today, it is no less so.

Misguided science has allowed us to kill babies in the womb and old people before their time. Educators scoff at the Bible and ridicule young children for their faith in God. The entertainment industry teaches people how to laugh at filth and constantly pumps perversion into homes, where even little children have access.





### Reflection Connection

*Do you think there are people who possess an attitude that they have sinned so grievously that God will not forgive them? Explain. What can the Church do to assist people who have lost all hope that God loves them? What ways can you assist your pastor to reach people in the community around you? Ask for volunteers to sit down with the Pastor and discuss this.*

Jesus also sees them as “scattered.” That is, they have no direction and no protection. Sheep are not strong, swift or smart. They have a tendency to go astray, aimlessly wandering off.

*When a person becomes a Christian, Jesus protects them, guides them and keeps them. He is their Good Shepherd (John 10:4).*

**Let’s look finally at the commission of the Saints** (vv. 37-38). This establishes our call to be servants. Here the image changes from the Shepherd and the sheep to the farmer and the field. *The image of the flock of sheep tells us that we need God. The image of the field tells us God needs us! It is a call to action, a call to serve!*

**First, notice how Jesus poses the problem.** He says “the harvest truly is plentiful but the laborers are few” (v. 37). It can look completely overwhelming. The multitudes who came were all in desperate need. And if one keeps his eyes on the problem, the odds are no solution will be forthcoming.

*How many times are we hindered from doing the Lord’s work because we are so overwhelmed by the need? Even worse, when we look around we also notice how few laborers there are to go into the field and work. It would be depressing if Jesus had stopped when He said, “The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.” But He did not!*

**Second, notice that Jesus proposes the prescription** (v. 38). “Pray ye, therefore,” is the healing balm Jesus offers. We are to consider the needs and commit them to God in prayer. If laborers are few, we are to pray for many.

### Golden Greek Nugget

The word translated “receipt of custom” (v. 9) is only found once in Matthew’s Gospel. It is, however, found in the parallel passages in Mark (2:14) and Luke (5:27). It literally means “tax office.” This may seem to imply a modern-day office facility. This was not the case then. The “office” was more like a lemonade stand! It was there, as Matthew sat exchanging the people’s money, that Jesus called him to serve as an apostle.

### Wrap Up

*Matthew chapter nine gives us two important ways we may discover who real Christians are. First, real Christians are cleansed from their sins. Their lives have been changed by Jesus. They are new creations in Christ.*

*Second, as new creations, they are called to serve their Savior. Being called to serve is not only a privilege but also positive proof that a person is a real Christian. Jesus summons us to go where He goes and minister to all peoples just as He did. No greater question could each person in the study group consider than this: “Am I a real Christian?”*

