



**4. Popular Christianity can teach us some valuable lessons.** When the Israelites came into the land of Canaan, after several generations they appealed to Samuel for a king. As Scripture records it, part of the motivation for that appeal was a desire to be “like all the nations” around them (1 Sam. 8:5). Within the church we have often struggled with the same problem. Perceived successes within the

religious world have often made brethren desire to imitate the churches around us. Recent changes within Popular Christianity have revealed the fallacy of this type of thinking. Efforts that once seemed to yield great success now may be responsible for waning numbers within these churches. The effort to make worship a slick and polished entertainment experience is starting to back-fire. In a 2013 *Christian Post* article that asks the question, “Is the Church Trying too Hard to Entertain?” one young woman comments: “The church has become such a show these days. It operates just as a play on Broadway. You have your production team, singers, musicians, dancers, skits....What happened to just plain church?” Another claims, “I have stopped attending church for that very reason. If I want to be entertained, I can go to a movie.”<sup>4</sup> True disciples of Christ have always worshipped God “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23). We must be content to serve God as He has authorized regardless of whatever fads and gimmicks Popular Christianity seeks to indulge.



<sup>4</sup> Bridgett, Diana. “Is the Church Trying too Hard to Entertain?” *Christian Post* (Feb. 7, 2013) [online] <http://www.christianpost.com/news/is-the-church-trying-too-hard-to-entertain-89610/#AgX6cX1rbIJysvTf.99>

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ISSUE

18.14

BULLETIN OF  
THE OLSEN  
PARK CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

# Faithful Sayings

April 3,  
2016



## Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM  
10:00 AM  
11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

## Elders:

Pat Ledbetter  
Jeff Nunn  
Kyle Pope

## Deacons:

Steve Dixon  
Ryan Ferguson  
Arend Gressley  
Ben Hight  
Jack Langley  
Blake McAlister  
Brady McAlister  
Walker McAnear  
Sam Nunn  
Lance Purcell  
Rusty Scott  
Justin Smiley  
Trevor Yontz

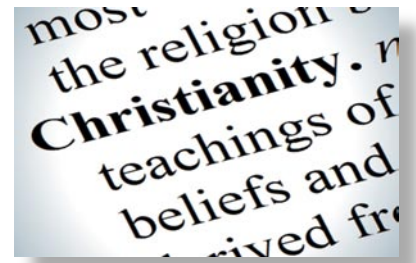
## Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

## Christianity

By Kyle Pope

The word *Christianity* is not found in the Bible. As is true of all religious terms that are not Bible words, this provides the potential for much confusion in meaning and application. Some use it as a synonym for the word “church” as found in Scripture in its universal sense. If that’s how one chooses to use it, then logically we must apply biblical definitions to determine what constitutes and defines one as a “Christian.” Only then may its meaning truly approximate biblical concepts. Those who are truly Christ’s disciples abide in His word (John 8:31). All true disciples are “Christians”—that is those *belonging to Christ*—and are therefore members of Christ’s church universally (Acts 11:26). *Christianity* in that sense would only refer to those who faithfully follow Scripture and truly have a saved relationship with God in Christ (cf. Heb. 12:22-24).



Even Christians, however, sometimes use the term in a much different sense—as it is used most commonly in popular speech. Our world defines *Christianity* as, “the religion based on the person and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, or its beliefs and practices” (*New Ox-*

*ford American Dictionary*). This definition is inherently ambiguous in that it offers no standard by which one may determine what constitutes “the religion based on” Jesus. It does not set forth the Bible as a guide to outline sound “beliefs and practices.” Yet, this definition is what is used when people say things like, “Christianity is the world’s largest religion, with over 2.4 billion adherents,”<sup>1</sup> or critics of faith blame *Christianity* for things such as the crusades or the Spanish Inquisition. To distinguish this from the first definition above let’s call this broader ambiguous sense “Popular Christianity.” If we seek to restore biblical principles in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it is important to consider some things about Popular Christianity in light of Scripture and changes in modern culture.

**1. Popular Christianity must be distinguished from sound faith.** The Bible

makes it clear that simply calling Jesus “**Lord, Lord**” does not put one in a saved relationship with God in Christ (Matt. 7:21-22). On the contrary, “**The Lord knows those who are His**” (2 Tim. 2:19, NKJV). Jesus’ disciples must, “**Hold fast the pattern of sound words**” as taught in the gospel (2 Tim. 1:13). To do otherwise is to surrender a relationship with God the Father and Jesus the Son (2 John 9-11).

While Popular Christianity might be thought to include within its ranks those who practice sound faith, the world would also likely include those who reject the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, the reality of heaven and hell, or even the resurrection of Jesus. Much like Thomas Jefferson, who in his historic *Jefferson Bible* removed most elements of the supernatural and preserved only the morals and philosophy of Jesus, Popular Christianity considers one as a follower of Jesus so long as he or she accepts anything about Jesus. As the Bible teaches it, to fail to accept all the Bible teaches about Jesus is to accept “**another Jesus**” and a “**different gospel**” (2 Cor. 11:4).

## **2. Popular Christianity rejects biblical patterns regarding what defines one as a “Christian.”**

When Jesus issued the Great Commission He told His apostles to make disciples 1) “**baptizing them**” (Matt. 28:19) and 2) “**teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you**” (Matt. 28:20), promising “**He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned**” (Mark 16:16). In spite of this, Popular Christianity considers people Christians who have no personal faith in



<sup>1</sup> “Christianity” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity>

Jesus, but may have been sprinkled at birth in a religious hospital or born into a family that holds some claim of faith in Christ. That’s like allowing one to be considered a US citizen without passing the requirements set by the Federal Government to attain citizenship.

## **3. Changes within Popular Christianity do not affect true faith.**

The past decades have seen major changes in Popular Christianity. Membership in the Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian churches (once the most prominent denominations in the United States) have declined dramatically from 1990-2008 (61).<sup>2</sup> Perhaps in an attempt to counter this, some segments of Popular Christianity have chosen to reject fundamental moral principles taught in the Bible. In 2011 LifeWay Research, conducted a survey on the question, “Do you believe homosexual behavior is a sin?” While 82% of those who considered themselves born-again, evangelical, or fundamentalist said *yes*, 51% of other religious groups said *no*! While some of those “other religious groups” may not consider themselves “Christian,” it appears that many of them do.<sup>3</sup> That shows that a growing number of those who consider themselves “Christians” also now consider homosexual conduct acceptable.

While Christians should be disturbed by anyone who accepts and tolerates sin, recognizing that Popular Christianity is not the same as sound faith allows the Christian to view such developments in a much different light. Paul

<sup>2</sup> “Table 75. Self-Described Religious Identification of Adult Population: 1990, 2001, and 2008.” *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012*. Ed. U.S. Census Bureau. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/lifeway-research-homosexual-behavior-survey>

taught the Corinthians that we may expect that those in the world will be “**sexually immoral**”—“**covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters**” (1 Cor. 5:9-10)—but we do not have the same attitude toward the world we must have toward anyone “**named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater**” (1 Cor. 5:11). The actions of a worldly-minded soul is no less sinful just because one tries to call himself a “Christian.” The Holy Spirit says, “**Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy**” (Rev. 22:11, NIV). Further apostasy on the part of an already apostate and erroneous faith doesn’t change anything about the truth and it should not cause us to feel anxiety about the validity of the Lord’s church. Christ’s kingdom is an eternal kingdom that “**shall stand forever**” (Dan. 2:44, NKJV).