

# are you a "Christian" or a "follower of Jesus"?

**Lisa Miller says it best** - Many people have begun calling themselves "followers of Jesus" rather than "Christians," because that name is too often associated with stereotypes, such as hypocrisy, judgmentalism, and a particular political party, which they want to avoid

I believe that the content inside is more important than the label on the outside, but I have a couple of questions about this trend

1. Is the name "Christian" so badly damaged that we can no longer use it? Some names are irredeemable. If my name was "Judas" or "Hitler," I would probably seek to start fresh with a new name. But the term "Christian" comes with a rich biblical and historical tradition, and we should think twice before we give up on it and move on. After all, it won't be long until the "followers of Jesus" tarnish the name with their sins or errant theology, and then will we have to start over with a new name?

2. This is already happening, as an increasing number of people use the term "follower of Jesus" as a way to avoid the need to believe in Him. They say that it isn't necessary that we know about and rely on Jesus as long as we follow His example of inclusive love. **I have heard this so often that whenever I hear someone say that they are a follower of Jesus, I instinctively ask if they believe in Him, too**

Richard Mouw, the President of Fuller Seminary, must have had a similar experience, for he notes in the article that those who use the term "follower of Jesus" tend to diminish the deity of Christ. They think it's more important to follow the moral example of the human Jesus than to believe in his salvation as the Son of God

In sum, I think that we should fight to redeem important names and labels, and only discard them when that no longer seems possible. I call myself a Christian, or "little Christ," because I am a follower of Jesus

*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away;" [John 15:1-2](#)*

*Not every professing Christian is a genuine follower of Jesus Christ. Now, it's not our job to determine who is or isn't truly a believer. That judgment belongs to God alone. However, those of us who profess faith in Christ can be certain of our own salvation. Christ's warning prompts the question, "Are you a genuine follower of Jesus?"*

*Jesus' illustration is significant. In Scripture, Israel had been referred to as the vine ([Isaiah 5:4](#); [Jeremiah 2:21](#)). So, when Jesus said, "I am the true vine," He declared that being a child of God required more than Jewish heritage. It requires a living union with Him, which produces spiritual fruit as evidence. In other words, there's no such thing as a "no fruit" Christian. Weak branches may produce meager fruit but dead branches never produce fruit at all.*

*Judas is an example of a dead branch ([John 13:21-30](#)). Although he spent three years in Jesus' inner circle, he remained spiritually dead. He never responded in faith to God's Word spoken by God's own Son. Yet he must have kept up appearances because he was so trusted by the other disciples that he was their treasurer ([John 13:29](#)). Likewise, the good things you do are not genuine spiritual fruit if you're not a genuine follower of Jesus*

*According to Jesus, false disciples will continue to coexistence with believers until He returns ([Matthew 13:30-50](#)). The warnings in those parables are just as dire as in today's illustration. "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned"*

*In [Matthew 7:22-23](#), Jesus described the final cutting away of dead, fruitless branches, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"*

*So, is the Holy Spirit convicting or confirming? Are you producing spiritual fruit as evidence of your union with Jesus? If not, please don't ignore these warnings. In order to be a child of God, you must also be a genuine follower of Jesus Christ*