

# A Bible-Defined Christian

## Letting the Bible Speak for Itself

---

In October 1993, a Seventh-day Adventist historian and theologian named George Knight made a stunning admission in print. Writing about the founders of his own denomination — men and women who gave their lives to recovering what they believed was biblical truth — he said this:

*"Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination's Fundamental Beliefs. More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief number 2, which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity."*

Read that slowly. The people who *built* the house could not get through the front door of it today.

Knight wasn't writing as a critic of Adventism. He was writing as a careful historian telling an uncomfortable truth: somewhere between the founding generation and the 1980 revision of official SDA Fundamental Beliefs, the denomination quietly aligned itself with Rome and mainstream Protestantism on the four core tenets of the trinity ([detailed study](#)). The founders — who read their Bibles carefully enough to recover the seventh-day Sabbath from nearly universal neglect — believed in a literal Father and a literal Son. Their theological grandchildren signed a creed that replaced that relationship with a metaphysical construct no biblical author ever described.

This is not primarily a study about Seventh-day Adventists. They simply provide a vivid, well-documented example of a pattern that repeats across church history: a community begins with Scripture and ends with a statement of faith that Scripture itself cannot fully support. The question that puts on the table is one every believer needs to answer personally —

**What does the Bible actually say a Christian is?**

---

### What's in the Name

The word *Christian* — *Christianós* in Greek (G5546) — appears exactly three times in the entire New Testament: [Acts 11:26](#), [Acts 26:28](#), and [1 Peter 4:16](#). That's it. Three occurrences for a label that now defines more than two billion people and hundreds of competing institutions.

What's striking is where the name comes from. [Acts 11:26](#) tells us the disciples "*were first called Christians in Antioch.*" The passive voice matters — they were *called* this, most likely by outsiders looking in. The community itself used other language. They called their movement *hē Hodós* — **The Way** ( [Acts 9:2](#), [19:9](#), [24:14](#) ). They called each other *mathētēs* — **disciples**, literally *learners* ( [Acts 6:1-2](#) ). They were *hágioi* — **saints**, set-apart ones ( [Romans 1:7](#) ). They were *adelphoí* — **brothers** ( [Acts 1:15](#), [Romans 1:13](#) ). They were *pistoi* — **faithful ones, believers** ( [Acts 10:45](#), [1 Timothy 4:12](#) ).

None of these terms are creedal. Not one of them requires assent to a doctrinal formula. Every single one of them describes a *way of living and relating* — to God, to Jesus, and to each other.

So if the label itself carries no built-in theological definition, the honest question becomes: where do we find one? The answer is straightforward. We go to the person whose name the label bears, and we ask what *he* said.

---

### Jesus Defines His Own Followers

Jesus was not vague about who belonged to him. He gave clear, concrete, testable markers — not creeds to affirm, but realities to live. Consider what he actually said.

*"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* ( [John 8:31-32](#) )

The threshold is not correct belief about his nature. It is *abiding in his word* — staying inside it, being shaped by it, returning to it as the authority. A disciple is someone in an ongoing, active relationship with what Jesus taught.

*"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* ( [John 13:35](#) )

Here the defining mark is visible and social, not doctrinal. The watching world isn't supposed to identify Jesus's followers by their statement of faith. They're supposed to recognize them by how they treat each other. This is uncomfortably practical.

*"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* ( [John 14:15](#) )

Love is not merely a feeling Jesus affirms — it is expressed through obedience. And the commandments in view are not novel instructions. He said plainly in [Matthew 5:17](#), *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to*

fulfill them." The commands Jesus points his followers toward are rooted in the same moral framework Jehovah established from the beginning.

*"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* ( [John 17:3](#); [Jeremiah 10:10](#) )

This single verse does extraordinary work. Eternal life — the whole point of the gospel — is defined by Jesus himself as knowing two distinct persons: **Jehovah**, identified as *the only true God*, and Jesus, identified as the one *sent* by that God. The one who sends and the one who is sent are not the same person. The language of mission requires distinction.

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* ( [Matthew 7:21](#) )

This may be the most searching statement Jesus ever made about identity. Calling Jesus "Lord" — confessing him, invoking his name — is not the qualifying marker. *Doing the Father's will* is. Verbal confession without lived obedience doesn't meet Jesus's own standard.

What emerges from these passages is a portrait of a follower defined by **abiding, loving, obeying, knowing, and doing** — not by subscribing to a doctrinal formula about God's nature.

It's also worth noting how consistently Jesus pointed away from himself as an independent source. Eight times in John's Gospel alone he makes statements like these:

*"The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing."* ( [John 5:19](#) )

*"My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me."* ( [John 7:16](#) )

*"I have not spoken on my own authority. The Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment — what to say and what to speak."* ( [John 12:49](#) )

A person who speaks only on delegated authority, who acts only in accordance with what he sees his Father do, who explicitly identifies someone else as *the only true God* — that person is not describing a co-equal relationship among three persons of identical nature. He is describing a Son in willing, loving submission to his Father.

---

## The Commands He Kept — Including the One Most Churches Skip

If keeping Jesus's commandments is a defining mark of his followers, it's worth asking which commandments he himself kept and taught. The answer is not complicated. Jesus observed the seventh-day Sabbath — not as a Jewish legal obligation but as his established pattern. [Luke 4:16](#) notes simply that going to the synagogue on the Sabbath was "*his custom*."

He also declared himself "*Lord of the Sabbath*" ( [Mark 2:28](#) ) — a statement of authority over the day, not a declaration that the day was finished. You don't claim lordship over something you're about to abolish.

When challenged on Sabbath practice, Jesus's response in [Mark 2:27](#) cuts through every "that's just for Jews" objection with surgical precision: "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*"

The Greek word for *man* there is *anthropos* — the generic term for humanity. Not *Ioudaios*. Not *Hebrews*. *Humanity*. And the verb *was made* points backward — to [Genesis 2:1-3](#), where Jehovah himself rested on the seventh day, blessed it, and made it holy.

Here's what's worth serious consideration: the Sabbath wasn't established at Sinai. It was established at creation — before Abraham, before Moses, before Israel existed as a nation. And it wasn't established alone. Three things were woven into the fabric of human existence at creation, before any covenant, before any law code: **work, marriage, and rest**. Jehovah worked and then rested ( [Genesis 2:1-3](#) ). He joined man and woman as one ( [Genesis 2:24](#) ). He gave humanity purposeful labor to tend and keep the garden ( [Genesis 2:15](#) ). Jesus himself appealed to both the Sabbath and marriage as creation realities when religious leaders challenged him ( [Mark 2:27-28](#); [Matthew 19:3-6](#) ). These aren't Jewish customs. They're part of the original design for what it means to be human.

The common objection — that the Sabbath and other commandments were "*nailed to the cross*" — rests on a misreading of [Colossians 2:14](#), which describes the *dogma*, the written ordinances of the ceremonial law system — the sacrificial calendar, the ritual washings, the codes tied to the temple system — as the thing cancelled at the cross. The Decalogue is never called *dogma* in Scripture. The ten moral commandments and the ceremonial ordinance system are not the same thing, and treating them as interchangeable produces a reading the text cannot sustain. (See the linked [study on Colossians 2:14](#) for a more-full treatment.)

The nine-commandments problem is also worth consideration: if the fourth commandment was abolished at the cross, which verse abolishes it specifically — and why do the other nine remain untouched? (See also the linked [study on the Sabbath](#).)

---

## A Working Definition

Drawing these threads together, here is what a Bible-defined Christian looks like — not a creedally-certified one, not a denominationally-approved one, but one shaped entirely by what Jesus himself said.

A Bible-defined Christian **abides in Jesus's words**, allowing them to be the ongoing authority over thought and behavior. Such a person is marked by **genuine love for other believers** — the kind that's visible enough for outsiders to notice. They **keep the commandments of God** as an expression of love for Jesus, including the Sabbath Jehovah established at creation and Jesus himself observed as his regular custom. They **know Jehovah as the only true God** and Jesus as the one Jehovah sent — two distinct persons in a relationship of deep unity, not a three-personed metaphysical compound. And they are committed to **doing the Father's will**, not merely confessing the right formula about him.

This definition asks more of a person than signing a statement of faith. It also offers more — because it's grounded in a living relationship rather than institutional membership.

---

## The Honest Questions

Scripture and the trinity agree on this much — there is one God. But from there, the paths diverge sharply.

The four core tenets of the trinity, shared by Rome and mainstream Protestantism — and now by official Adventism since 1980 ([see linked study](#)) — are: (a) there is one God; (b) that one God consists of three coeternal persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; (c) each of the three persons is fully God; (d) all three persons share the same nature (see [documented study - 2nd page](#)). The SDA founders — the ones George Knight says couldn't join today — did not hold this. They held what the text actually says: a literal Father and a literal Son, distinct in person and in role ([same study - 1st page](#)).

So here are the questions worth considering, with your Bible open:

**Where does any biblical author describe the one God as consisting of three coeternal persons?** The *Shema* of [Deuteronomy 6:4](#) declares that Jehovah is *one*. Jesus quotes it approvingly in [Mark 12:29](#). Paul makes it explicit in [1 Corinthians 8:6](#): "*there is one God, the Father.*" One God — the Father. (*The Hebrew word echad used in the Shema is sometimes claimed to always mean a composite unity — a group rather than an individual. Scripture itself contradicts this. See the [linked study on echad](#) for the full case.*) Where, in plain biblical language, is the three-personed compound?

**If each of the three persons is fully and equally God, what do we do with Jesus's own words?** He said the Father is "*greater than I*" ([John 14:28](#)). He identified the Father as "*the only true God*" ([John 17:3](#)). He said he spoke nothing on his own authority but only what the Father commanded — eight times, in his own words. Equal nature and consistent subordination of authority cannot both be true at once without redefining what both words mean.

**What is Jesus's own standard for final judgment?** Not a creed. "*The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.*" ([John 12:48](#)) The standard is Jesus's words — which include everything he said about knowing the Father as the only true God, about abiding, about loving, about keeping commandments.

The question isn't whether your church has the right statement of faith. The question is whether your life — and your understanding of who God is — aligns with what Jesus actually said. Have you tested it?

---

## A Definition Worth Living

The early believers called themselves followers of *The Way*. That's a movement word, a direction word — not a membership word. It implies you're going somewhere, being shaped by something, walking a path.

George Knight's observation cuts both ways. Yes, the SDA founders couldn't join today's SDA church. But they also left us a reminder that creedal drift is real, that institutions eventually tend toward the theologies of the institutions around them, and that the only reliable anchor is the text itself — read carefully, honestly, and without the pressure of fitting a predetermined conclusion. I have, several times, had to change my preconceived ideas. It was hard, but I'm glad I did. I must know the truth about the Bible. ([John 8:31-32](#))

A Bible-defined Christian doesn't need a council to tell them who God is. They have Jesus's own words. They have a Father whom Jesus himself identified as the only true God. They have a Son who pointed unfailingly toward that Father. They have commandments rooted in creation itself — including a Sabbath made for *anthropos*, for humanity — as a weekly reminder of who made us and why rest matters.

That's not a narrowing of the faith. That's the faith, as Jesus described it — and it's more than enough to build a life on.

---

Desiring to live by every word that comes from the mouth of Jehovah ([Deut8:3; Matt4:4](#))

[-Sid Nash](#): 08/02/2026. Latest version: <https://sidnash.org/docs/BibleChristian.html>

---

*Drafted in collaboration with Claude (AI), with all theological positions, Scripture selections, and final wording reviewed and approved by the author.*