

# The Trouble With Christian Phrases



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When CNN posted an article on its Belief Blog asking, “Do you speak Christian?” author John Blake looked into the various phrases that Christians use to describe things, like being “born again,” that may be confusing to those outside the Christian culture. It’s actually a pretty poor article that merely catalogs a bunch of phrases the author seems to find amusing, but it brings up an important point. Are you aware of the words and phrases you are using in your everyday life and how others, especially nonbelievers, perceive them?

This is a debate that goes on in many churches and ministries across the country. Our culture is less Christian and less

knowledgeable about Christian ideas than at any point in its history. We can't assume that our co-workers and neighbors are going to understand a lot of words and phrases that we take for granted, especially those of us who have grown up in the church.

If I tell my co-workers that I have been "saved by grace," many of them would have no idea what that means. Terms like that are so common to Christians that we don't even notice when we're using them. But it is important to be aware; because if we use phrases like that with people who don't understand, it can be off-putting. It hints to them at a special group—a special language that only insiders understand.

Unfortunately we are not talking about something as tangible or simple as what we had for breakfast. In Christianity God reveals himself to us, and we are dealing with ideas and concepts that aren't normally discussed at the water cooler. We have to be able to describe these ideas; and so, naturally, we are forced to use words that many people do not use in their everyday lives. The word *justification* explains a very important, essential Christian idea, but it's not exactly trending on Twitter right now.

There's nothing wrong with having words and phrases that explain important concepts, as it allows us to discuss our faith intelligibly. The issue lies in how and when we use these words and how comfortable we get

with them. It's all about knowing your audience.

I remember when I was in college leading a Bible study of mature Christian guys. We were studying Romans and throwing around a lot of these words and phrases because everyone understood them and was comfortable using them. Then in the middle of the semester, one of our members brought a non-Christian friend with him. Immediately we had to change the tone of the study so he wouldn't feel left out or ignorant. My co-leader and I kept catching ourselves saying things he might not understand. We started re-phrasing. We still studied the same material and discussed the same subjects, but we had to be mindful of our new audience.