ANKYRA

# Church Words Explained

The words everyone assumes you already know. Nobody should have to nod along.

Christians use a lot of words that mean little outside a church, and almost nobody wants to be the one who asks. So people nod along for years. This sheet exists so you do not have to.

Definitions are kept short on purpose. Where a verse is given, it is the clearest place to see the word in use, not the only one. If a word here still does not make sense, ask someone at your church: it is a good question, not a daft one.

## The six everything else hangs on

**Gospel** Literally "good news". Not advice about being a better person, but news about something God has already done. Mark 1:1 · 1 Corinthians 15:3–4

**Sin** More than doing bad things. It is living as though God is not God: running your own life. Everybody does it. Romans 3:23

**Grace** God's kindness given to people who have not earned it and cannot. The opposite of wages. Ephesians 2:8–9

**Faith** Trust. Not a feeling, and not a leap in the dark: trusting someone enough to act on it. Hebrews 11:1

**Repentance** A change of mind that changes direction. Turning from running your own life to following God. Acts 3:19

**Saved / salvation** Rescued. From the penalty of sin now, from its grip day to day, and one day from its presence altogether.

## What happened at the cross

**Atonement** How the gap between God and people is closed: Jesus taking what we had coming. 1 John 4:10

**Justification** A courtroom word. God declaring a guilty person to be in the right with him, on account of Jesus, not on account of them. Romans 5:1

**Redemption** A marketplace word. Being bought out of slavery, at a price. Ephesians 1:7

**Righteousness** Being right with God, and then living rightly because of it. Not the same thing as being respectable.

**Sanctification** The slow, lifelong business of becoming more like Jesus after you have been forgiven. Unfinished in everyone you will ever meet. 1 Thessalonians 4:3

## Who Jesus is

**Christ / Messiah** Not a surname. A title meaning “anointed one”: God’s promised king. Christ is the Greek, Messiah the Hebrew; same word.

**Lord** Master, and owner. It is also the word the Greek Old Testament uses for God, so calling Jesus Lord is a claim about who he is, not a polite title. Romans 10:9

**Incarnation** God the Son becoming a human being without ceasing to be God. John 1:14

**Resurrection** Jesus physically alive again on the third day. Not a ghost and not a metaphor: people ate with him. 1 Corinthians 15:3–8

**Trinity** One God who is eternally three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not three gods, and not one God in three costumes. The word is not in the Bible; the teaching is drawn from it. Matthew 28:19

## Words you will hear around church

**Church** The people, not the building. The Greek word simply means a gathering.

**Disciple** An apprentice. Someone who follows Jesus and is being changed by him. It is what Christians are called through most of the New Testament; the word “Christian” appears only three times. Acts 11:26

**Baptism** Going under the water as a public sign of being joined to Jesus in his death, and coming up into his risen life. Romans 6:3–4

**Communion** Bread and wine, taken together, remembering Jesus’ death until he returns. Also called the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist, or breaking bread. Churches differ on what is happening; all agree it matters. 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

**Fellowship** The Greek word means sharing in something together. Closer to being in the same crew than to coffee afterwards.

**Testimony** Your own account of what God has done in your life. It does not have to be dramatic to be true.

**Worship** The whole-life response to God. Singing is part of it, not all of it. Romans 12:1

**Confession** Two meanings: agreeing with God about your sin, and saying publicly what you believe. 1 John 1:9

# Words you will meet when the Bible is read out

**Covenant** A binding relationship God sets up, with promises attached. The old covenant came through Moses, the new one through Jesus. Luke 22:20

**Kingdom of God** Not a place. God's rule and reign, wherever he is actually king.

**Holy** Set apart, different. Of God: utterly pure and other. Of people: belonging to God.

**Born again** A new start that God gives, not self-improvement you manage. Jesus' own phrase. John 3:3

**Gentile** Anyone who is not Jewish. Which is most of us.

**Prophet** Someone who speaks God's message to people. Far more often about the present than the future.

**Apostle** "One who is sent." In the New Testament, the men Jesus specifically commissioned.

**Flesh** In Paul's letters this usually means self-centred human nature rather than the body. Some translations say "sinful nature" instead; check which yours uses. Romans 8:5

**Saint** In the New Testament, every Christian, not a special class of them. Some translations say "God's holy people". 1 Corinthians 1:2

**Amen** "That is true", or "let it be so". You are agreeing with what was said, not signing off.

### Two things worth knowing

**The same word, different translations.** Bibles do not all use the same English words. One says "flesh" where another says "sinful nature"; one says "saints" where another says "God's holy people". Neither is wrong. If a word here does not appear in your Bible, that is usually why.

**Knowing the word is not the point.** Someone who cannot define justification but trusts Jesus is in a far better position than someone who can define it and does not. This sheet is a ladder, not a test.

### IF YOU TAKE ONE THING FROM THIS SHEET

There is no such thing as a stupid question. If a word gets used at church or in a Bible study and you do not know it, ask. You will not be the only one who did not know, only the only one honest enough to say so.

© Ankyra. Free to print and share for non-commercial use (Creative Commons BY-NC 4.0). The whole Bible, with study notes and a glossary of key words: ankyra.uk