

TEXT SERMONS

WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

Acts 11:26

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

Acts 26:28

"Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

I Peter 4:14

"If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God"

Who is a Christian? Many are the answers that have been given to this question. A dictionary definition does not help us very much: "Christian -- the professor of the religion of Christ." According to that definition, the majority of people in the United States would be considered Christian.

Illustration: A pastor was invited to a home for Sunday dinner with one of the families in the church. In the course of their conversation around the table he asked the host's little daughter how she would define a Christian? She answered, "People who go to church, talk about religion and take the preacher home for dinner." That was her idea of a Christian, which doubtless, she had gathered from the "professing" Christians with whom she had come in contact.

These definitions, while they may contain a minor grain of truth, are not correct. We need the Bible answer to this question for multitudes profess to be Christians who are not Christian at all. "Christian names are everywhere; but Christian men are very rare."

Some think that because they are born in a Christian country or have Christian parents, or have affiliated themselves with a Christian church, that they are Christian. The fact of the matter is that one can do all these things and still not be a Christian. We must turn to God's dictionary for the answer to the question, "Who is a Christian?"

In the New Testament true Christians were called "saints" about 60 times; "disciples" 30 times; "believers" 80 times; "brethren" about 200 times and "Christian" only three times and yet this is the name that has stuck through the centuries. Why is this? Because the name "Christian" not only denotes the one who is the leader, Christ, but it was also meant to describe the follower. The word "Christian" itself, as to its etymology, comes from two words: "Christos" which is the Greek for Christ with the Latin ending "iani."

Who is a Christian?

To answer the question, "Who is a Christian?" let us examine the three times in the New Testament where the word "Christian" is found and then allow the Spirit of God to measure us to see if we are deserving of this name.

I. A CHRISTIAN IS ONE WHO BELIEVES IN CHRIST.

"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." (Acts 11:27, 28)

The apostle Paul witnessed to King Agrippa and encouraged him to believe savingly in Jesus Christ. In doing so he was not advocating a simple belief in the existence of Christ. There are those who do believe in the historical Jesus Christ -- that He was an actual person who lived in history and because they believe the historical record of his personhood, they assume that they are Christians. That cannot be the case at all. There are those who vehemently reject Jesus Christ as Savior, but who do believe that He existed.

James, in his epistle writes, "The devils also believe, and tremble." (James 2:19) To merely believe in the existence of Jesus Christ is only to believe as the devil believes. Obviously, this is not a saving belief. Agrippa himself already believed in the physical existence of Jesus Christ. Paul was not trying to convince Agrippa that Jesus existed.

A Christian is one who not only believes in the existence of Jesus Christ but who also willingly and lovingly embraces Jesus Christ as Savior from sin. Agrippa did not embrace Jesus Christ as his Savior. The word "believe" means to trust in, cling to, and rely upon. Therefore not just a profession of the religion of Christ but the possessor of the person of Christ is a Christian.

Illustration: Evangeline Booth, daughter of William Booth the founder of the Salvation Army, when a little girl, had a pet monkey. One day she dressed the monkey in a specially made uniform of the Salvation Army. Her mother was displeased. She hastily undressed the monkey, but little Evangeline couldn't understand. "Why did you undress the monkey?" she asked. Mother Booth replied, "Because the monkey doesn't have the life and so it cannot wear the uniform!" No person should call themselves a Christian who does not have the life of Christ. I John 5:12 reads, "*He that has the Son has life.*" God-life is the portion of those who have embraced the Son of God as their Savior. They and they alone are qualified to call themselves by the holy name "Christian"!

II. A CHRISTIAN IS ONE WHO BELONGS TO CHRIST.

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." (Acts 11:26)

It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called by the name "Christian." The people of Antioch named the followers of Christ by what the Antiochian's saw in them - they saw in them the Lord Jesus Christ! They knew that these persons who were dubbed "Christian" belonged to The Christ. Their love, their lives and their labors were absorbed by their loyalty to Jesus.

Antioch was 300 miles north of Jerusalem, located on the main route of travel and trade to the rich Mesopotamian Valley. It was the capital of Syria, the third-largest city in the Roman Empire with approximately 1/2 million population. It was a great commercial center and also a center of heathen worship. There was the grave of Daphne, where heathenism appeared in its most tempting and debasing form. This was the setting in which the disciples were first called "Christians" - not in religious Jerusalem, but in wicked Antioch.

Here in this city of sin, the disciples light brightly shone. Here, where they dared to be different, they received the name "Christian". The name identified those who followed Christ as belonging to Him. These people were different, their speech was different, their lifestyle was different, their pursuits were different and their purpose in life was different from the general citizenry of Antioch. Although the name "Christian" may have been given initially as a derisive nick-name, it nevertheless, correctly described them.

The trouble today is that the average Christian does not like being different. This is an age of conformity. Separation, or the Bible word "holiness", is not popular among professing Christians who want the best of both worlds. The stock excuse is, "Everybody is doing it" - whatever the sinful "it" is! They do not like to be conspicuous and so they just go along with the crowd. Many are Christians in name only and those among whom they live and work would hardly recognize that there is any difference between them and those who are not the people of the Lord.

Matthew Henry said, "I reckon him a Christian indeed that is neither ashamed of the gospel nor a shame to it." How many who call themselves Christian are sneered at, ridiculed and/or reproached because they choose to follow the Lord and refuse to go with the crowd? How many who belong to Christ Jesus dare to openly live godly lives and are not ashamed of Him? It is of little consequence if church members call each other "Christian"; the more significant matter is: does the sinful society in which we live call us Christian? Is it obvious to them that we belong to Jesus Christ?

Illustration: Some inner-city derelicts from skid row were hired by a restaurant to carry signs advertising the restaurant. The signs told of the splendid meals served there and invited the public to follow the sign-bearer to the restaurant. But, the men who were carrying the signs were shabby and hungry looking in appearance. They were such poor advertisements of the restaurant they were advertising that no one followed them.

Many there are who wear the name "Christian" but are poor advertisements for such a high calling. The devil is willing for a person to profess Christianity just as long as he does not practice it. Evangelist D. L. Moody said, "The Christian is the world's Bible, and in many cases a revision is necessary."

My Neighbor's Bible
*"I am my neighbor's Bible
He reads me when we meet;
He reads me when I'm idle,
He reads me in the street."*

III. A CHRISTIAN IS ONE WHO BEHAVES LIKE CHRIST.

"If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter." (I Peter 4:16)

Verse 16 above is preceded by these words: *"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters."* (I Peter 4:14-15)

The “suffering” that Peter is talking about in these verses is not caused by sickness. It is the result persecution -- being reproached for the name of Christ. If we are Christians in the Bible sense of the word, what befell Christ will befall us -- that is, we will “suffer”. Why is it that a Christian who practices Christ-like living is opposed? It is because a genuine Christian makes non-Christians uncomfortable in their sin!

If we are transformed men and women we should adopt the Lord's standards for living. This will inevitably result in some degree of “suffering.” We may be called such things as “square”, “odd”, etc.; may be opposed and ostracized, but what matter just as long as we earn and adorn the name “Christian”?

Christian, take courage from these words from the lips of the Lord Jesus: *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”* (John 15:18-20)

We live in a world of sin, shame and sham; a world of darkness, danger and difficulty; a world of war, wrong and wickedness. In such a world the Christian is to expect reproach, endure deprivations, escape dangers and through it all exemplify the holy Son of God, come what may! When we sing John Newton’s hymn, “Amazing Grace”, do we identify with the words: “Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come”?

Illustration: The Duke of Wellington was walking down the street in London one day and saw before him a British soldier slouching against a lamp post. He approached the man and asked, “Why are you standing in such a non-military posture?” The soldier replied, “Sir, I am off duty.” The Duke of Wellington shot back these words, “A British soldier is never off duty! You are to always maintain your military posture because you represent the King.”

Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin? Have you surrendered your life to Him as your Lord and Master and does your behavior commend Him to others? Or are you an off duty Christian? Are you properly representing The King of Kings?

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