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## Let “Christian” Be Your Life, Not Your Label

Fred Nowell

The word or name “Christian” as defined by most Bible dictionaries is simply “*an adherent or follower of Christ.*” The word “Christian” can be found three times in the New Testament. It is found twice in the book of Acts. It is first used in 11:26, where Luke says that “*The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch,*” then again in 26:28 where Agrippa replied to Paul’s preaching of Christ. When asked if he believed the prophets of old which spoke of Jesus, Agrippa said “*You almost persuade me to be a Christian.*” Lastly, the name “Christian” is found in 1 Peter 4:16, where Peter said “*If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.*”

So who can wear this name? How can we understand the usage of this label in the first century and apply it today? Let us take each of these Scriptures and see if we can come up with a better understanding of those who let “Christian” be their life and not just a label.

First, let us journey into Antioch. The city of Antioch that is mentioned in Acts 11:26 was the capital of Syria. In the region of Pisidia (the mountain district of Asia Minor), there was also another city called Antioch. Antioch of Syria was a city that served as a safe haven for the followers of Christ. Because of the great persecution that arose with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 11:19), many disciples of Jesus were forced to leave their homes and go elsewhere. As these disciples preached the good news of salvation in Christ, “*a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord*” (Acts 11:21). This turning to the Lord was the same as it is today. One hears God’s saving message, receives that message, and with a contrite heart turns to the Lord who can save one’s soul by the cleansing power of His blood (Rom. 3:25, 5:9, 6:3ff; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). Many were added to the church of our Lord in Antioch (Acts 2:41,47, 11:24), being followers of the teachings and example of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:10; 1 Pet. 2:21), and now being “*called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will name*” (Isa 62:2), that name, “*Christian.*”

As the apostle Paul was allowed to speak in his own defense before King Agrippa, Paul was well aware that Agrippa was familiar with his mission, to open the eyes of the Gentiles, **“and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith...”** (Acts 26:18). We see a consistency with Paul as he pleads for repentance and obedience to the teachings that God has given him to bring to the ears that will hear. Paul did not work in the dark. Agrippa knew of the teaching of the prophets as well as the teachings of Paul. When Paul asked, **“King Agrippa, do you believe that prophets?”** Paul was confident to exclaim **“I know that you believe.”** Though Paul was correct in his statement, Agrippa was still unwilling to turn from sin and follow Christ. Instead, Agrippa told Paul, **“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”** There was an understanding that being a Christian meant that life would have to change. Not only was this a decision Agrippa would not make, but it is also one that the majority of the world will pass up as well.

The last mention of the word “Christian” is found in 1 Peter 4:16. Here we have a warning not to let suffering bring a Christian (follower of Christ) to shame. Paul said, **“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth”** (Rom 1:15). Inspiration promises that Christians will suffer for the cause of Christ (2 Tim 3:12). So when suffering of any kind comes, do not be ashamed, but glory in that you are counted worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ (Mt 5:10-12; Acts 5:41; Rom 5:3; 2 Cor 12:10; Phil 1:29; Jas 1:2).

Being a Christian is not having faith in or belief that Jesus is the Son of God, for Jesus Himself says that it is not enough, saying **“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven”** (Mt 7:21). James call the kind of faith that is based upon words only as a “dead faith” (Jas 2:17ff). When one hears the Word of God (receiving Bible faith - Romans 10:17), believes that Jesus is the Christ (Jn 8:24), turns from serving sin unto a life of service to God (Lk 13:3), confesses that Jesus is Lord and savior (Mt 10:32-33; Rom 10:10) and obeys the command of God to be immersed underwater for the forgiveness of their sin (Acts 2:38), one is added to the church of Christ (Acts 2:41, 47;

Rom 16:16). When one pursues the life of the Christian, they will shine (Mt 5:16), preach the Gospel to the lost (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16) and wear the God-given name “Christian” only! Let Christian be your life, NOT your label!