

## BIBLE STUDIES - WHO ARE YOU?

SERIES: **NAMES GOD USES FOR CHRISTIANS**  
*"A good name is to be more desired than great wealth." (Prov. 22:1)*

### Lesson #2 "CHRISTIAN"

"Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. **And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.**"  
 (Acts 11:25-26)

The name "Christian" is found only three times in the New Testament:

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."

1 Peter 4:16 - "...if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."

### VARIOUS NAMES THAT IDENTIFY GOD'S PEOPLE

Prior to Antioch the followers of Christ were known by such designations as:

- Nazarenes (Paul was accused of being "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."  
 (Acts 24:5);
- Galilaeans (Peter is accused of being a "Galilean." Luke 22:59);
- The Way (Saul, the pre-name of Paul, was sent to arrest those who belonged to "The Way," (Acts 9:2);
- Others: Disciples, believers, brethren, saints, etc. became more popular.
- Christians. (Acts 11:26) The name that has stuck through the centuries.

### ORIGIN OF THE NAME "CHRISTIAN"

There is a controversy over how the name "Christian" originated. There are two views:

1. Those who say that it was a derisive name given by the enemies of Christ, that it was a nickname intended to mock believers in Christ. That may have been the case, however, the evidence is slim.
2. Those who say that the name "Christian" was favorably applied to followers of Christ as a correct means of identification. In support of this view John of Antioch, Bishop of Antioch (428-441) gives an account of this matter in these words:  
 "At the beginning of the reign of Claudius Caesar, ten years after Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, was ascended up into heaven, Evodus became first Bishop of Antioch. Under him they were called Christians: for this same Bishop, Evodus, conferring with them, put this name upon them, whereas before the Christians were called Nazarenes and Galilaeans."

John Gill, English Baptist scholar (1697-1771) writes: "Whether this name of Christian,

was given by their enemies, or their friends is not certain, though it is most likely the latter.”

The famous commentator Matthew Henry said, “They gave themselves a name which their enemies could not but say was proper. It is probable they called themselves so and incorporated themselves by that title, whether by some solemn act of the church or ministers.”

It was a common practice in that time, that the followers would call themselves after the name of their leader. The Latin suffix “*ian*” means “belonging to the party of.” This suffix was added to the name “Christ” and the name “*Christ-ian*” hence “*Christian*,” was born. This was customary in that time. For instance, there existed:

- Augustinians – these were the followers of Nero Augustus;
- Herodians – this was the party of Herod;
- Christians – these were the followers of Christ, the Messiah.

It appears that God’s people gave themselves the name “*Christians*”. What better name could there be than the one that declares that one belongs to Christ? You and I should wear it as a badge of honor!

Our first study then, quite naturally it seems to me, should be the name “*Christian*”. This is the name most generally used today to identify God’s people both within and outside the church. However, we need to make sure that we understand what the name originally meant.

### WHO IS A “CHRISTIAN”?

Over time, the meaning of scriptural words are changed by our culture in a way which nullifies the original meaning. C. S. Lewis points out the fact that “gentleman” was once a very specific title used to identify a member of the “landed gentry”; in our present day it means a guy who does something decent, or even a name on a restroom door.

Unfortunately, the name “*Christian*” has suffered a similar fate. In the Bible it refers to those people who are trusting Jesus Christ to forgive their sins and they are following Him as their Master and Lord. Today, in the mind of the general populace, it refers to anyone who believes in God and tries to be good to some degree. In our study of the name “*Christian*” let us find out what God means by this designation.

A.W. Tozer, a Chicago pastor when I was a student at Moody Bible College in Chicago, writing in one of his many books, defined a Christian as follows:

“A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen, talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see, expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another, empties himself in order to be full, admits he is wrong so he can be declared right, goes down in order to get up, is stronger when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest, and happiest when he feels worst. He dies so he can live, forsakes in order to have, gives away so he can keep, sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passes knowledge.” (A.W. Tozer in *Root Of The Righteous*)

**Illust.** I was interviewed in Denver, Colorado for a radio program. The interviewer asked me, “What is a Christian?” She said she had asked many that question in preparation for the radio program. I asked her, “What were some of the answers you received?” She said, “Well, they were all different. For example, one person said, ‘Someone who goes to church’; another said, ‘One who keeps the Ten Commandments’; another said, ‘Living by the Sermon on the Mount makes you a Christian’; I even had a fellow answer, ‘Being born in a Christian family.’”

Then she asked me for my definition. I said, in rapid-fire fashion, “According to the New Testament, a Christian is one who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, belongs to Jesus Christ and behaves like Jesus Christ!” “Wow!” she said. “Have you got Bible for those statements?” I gave her various scriptures and she said that was the first time she really understood what being a Christian meant.

As we answer the question “**Who Is A Christian**” from the New Testament, there are at least two overarching parts to the answer. From the Acts 11 passage it is easy to see two outstanding truths about those who were first called Christians:

- A Christian is one who believes savingly in Jesus Christ, and
- A Christian is one who behaves saintly like Jesus Christ.

#### **A. A CHRISTIAN IS ONE WHO BELIEVES SAVINGLY IN JESUS CHRIST.**

v.21 “a great number **believed** and turned to the Lord.”

There are different ways to believe and different degrees of belief. For example, there is:

**Intellectual belief** – to say, “I believe in God” and to believe the Bible facts about a historical figure named Jesus Christ, just as one would believe the historical facts about George Washington;

**Emotional belief** - one who becomes teary-eyed and sentimental when they hear the hymn, “The Old Rugged Cross,” but never bows at the cross to trust the Savior Who sacrificed His life there for their sin;

**Religious belief** – observes the rituals and formalities of organized religion, trusting these acts to accomplish salvation. Example: Baptism, church membership and attendance, Lord’s Supper, observing religious holy days, etc.

**Mental assent belief** - according to the Bible, mere assent to God’s truth is not saving faith. (John 8:31-46; Acts 8:13-24; James 2:14-26). To say, “I believe the Bible from cover to cover” is not saving faith.

None of the above is a form of saving faith. What then is it to believe savingly? What is Bible belief, Bible faith?

The Greek words translated “*believe*” and “*faith*” have the same basic roots. Their meaning is summed up in the following statements:

“To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely to believe the facts of His historic life or of His saving work as facts, but to rest one’s soul upon Him for present and future salvation, and to accept and adopt His precepts and example as binding upon one’s life.” (from Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament)

“A belief that saves is one that rests in the finished work of Christ; it trusts God alone for salvation (John 3:16). Believers are those who have trusted God with their will as well as their mind (Rom 1:16; 3:22; 1 Thess 1:7). Some of the classic New Testament references dealing with belief, or faith, are John 3:16,36; Acts 16:31; Rom 3:21-5:1; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-10; & 1 Jn. 5:1.” (Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright (c)1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

“Saving faith is inward confidence in God’s promises and provisions in Christ for the salvation of sinners. It leads one to trust solely in the Person and work of the Savior Jesus Christ (John 3:16; 5:24; Eph 2:8-10). Such faith gives the believer an unchangeable and unforfeitable position described in innumerable passages as being “in Christ” (Rom 8:1; Eph 1:3; etc.)” (Unger’s Bible Dictionary.)

To sum up: To believe in, or on the person of Jesus Christ is more than a mere mental assent or exercise. It is so to accept Him in such a manner as to rest completely, absolutely and unreservedly upon Him alone for salvation; to trust Him unequivocally for all things that pertain to life and godliness and to draw upon and avail oneself of all that is offered by and through Him.

Here, in these statements, we see the importance of personal, saving faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Furthermore, the initial basic steps to becoming a Christian are made crystal clear in the account of the Christians at Antioch. These elements are:

- The gospel was preached – “preaching the Lord Jesus” v.20;
- The hand of the Lord (conviction of the Holy Spirit) blessed their witness – “the hand of the Lord was with them” v.21 (“The Lord’s hand” is an Old Testament metaphor for God’s power and favor (Ezra 9:7; Is 66:14);
- “A great number believed and turned to the Lord” v.21 – These individuals believed savingly in Christ.

Paul would later say to the church at Rome: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah said, Lord, who has believed our report? So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:13-17)

Jesus said: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if anyone hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20) This simple statement makes it clear that Jesus is not a gate crusher. He must be personally invited in. The door opens from the inside.

**Illust.** A well known painter by the name of Holman once painted a beautiful portrayal of Jesus standing outside a garden door. When he showed the finished painting to some

friends, they complimented him on his work. But one hesitatingly pointed out a clear flaw in the painting. The door had no handle. The painter simply said, "It only opens from the inside." This painting has been reprinted on countless gospel tracts to graphically present the idea of Rev. 3:20.

Do you remember the time you believed savingly, trusting the Lord Jesus to become your personal Savior and Lord?

**B. A CHRISTIAN IS ONE WHO BEHAVES SAINTLY LIKE JESUS CHRIST.**

v.21 "a great number believed **and turned** to the Lord." And v.23 "When he (Barnabas) came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord."

These Christians in Antioch had been changed by Christ. When Barnabas went to Antioch he saw "*the grace of God.*" Where did he see it? In the lives of the believers. Why were they called Christians? Because they had been changed by the grace and power of God and they were like the Christ whom they professed to follow!

Notice: They "*turned to the Lord.*" Paul said of the Christians in Thessalonica "you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." (I Thess. 1:9-10) This is certainly evidence of behaving saintly.

The question has been asked repeatedly, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" The Christians in Antioch and Thessalonica evidenced their Christianity! Their lifestyles had been changed by Christ and their behavior was drastically different from the non-Christians around them.

Antioch needed Christian influence. It was a horribly wicked city. It was the capital of Syria with half a million people, 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Josephus, the Jewish historian, called it "Antioch the Great, Queen of the East." Josephus ranked it as the third greatest city of the Roman Empire, behind Rome and Alexandria (Josephus *Jewish Wars* 3.29).

Its main street was 4 miles long and paved with marble and was the only city in the ancient world at that time that had its streets lighted by night. It was a cesspool of pleasures of every appetite: prostitution, slavery, sensuality, sexual perversion and idolatry of every description were rampant. Antioch was the Las Vegas of the Roman Empire!

The holy behavior of these followers of Christ must have been a breath of fresh air in a sewer of wickedness. Their kind, compassionate and benevolent life style was, to say the least, radically different. Their cultural contemporaries could not understand their peculiar conduct.

For example, early historians tell of rampant infanticide. Unwanted babies would be discarded upon rubbish heaps and left to die. It is said Christians would make their rounds and pick them up. In order to save them, they take them to the home. Later, rumors of cannibalism were based upon this practice. Such a culture could not understand such real Christian kindness and care.

Yes, they were different people. They were salting the world around them and shining their lights into the sinful darkness. Witnessing was the norm.

When we are changed by Christ there is a change in our reason and purpose for living. Paul summed it up with these words: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. 1:21) "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20)

There are many stories and examples of behavioral change at salvation in the Bible:

- In the ministry of Jesus, the story of Zaccheus tells of a crooked tax collector who had his greed changed to generosity;
- The woman at the well was changed from an adulterous woman to a fervent witness for the Lord. The same could be said of Mary Magdalene;
- The insane man of Gadara was changed into a normal person of sanity who was also a willing witness for the Lord;
- The Philippian jailer was changed overnight into a dedicated disciple;
- But the most classical example of change can be found in the story of Saul of Tarsus'. This persecutor and murderer of Christians was converted and changed into the great apostle and evangelist that the Lord used in a mighty way in turning the world upside down.

If we are true Christians, change should be just as radical and observable in us today. Christ-like behavior is the best proof that one is a Christian.

**Illust.** A worker in the medical profession wrote to Dear Abby to ask advice in dealing with a cranky coworker who constantly cursed and complained about the patients and the working conditions at job. The writer was especially bothered by her coworker's claim to be a faithful Christian. She wrote, "Her conversations are peppered with 'the Lord this' and 'the Lord that.' But I have a great difficulty understanding the inconsistencies between her proposed faith and her actions. Although I am not a member of a church, I wouldn't treat a dog the way this pious churchgoer treats people...In my experience those who thump their Bibles the loudest would benefit more by being thumped over the head by them."

**Illust.** I have a study book on the book of James titled, "A Belief That Behaves." The book of James tells us that if our behavior does not match our belief, if our profession does not match our practice, we have not believed savingly – he says our faith is dead! He put it this way in James 2:14-20:

"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?"



Do you wonder why the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch of all places? Wasn't it because the church in Antioch was a Spirit-filled, praying, good news-sharing, missions-minded body of believers displaying evidence of God's power and grace in their midst?

They were such a contagious congregation that twice Luke mentions the great response they received to sharing the Good News:

Acts 11:21 - "And a great number believed and turned to the Lord."

Acts 11:24b - "...and much people was added to the Lord." No wonder that they were "called Christians first in Antioch"!

**Illust.** There was a soldier in Alexander The Great's army whose name was also Alexander. He was a cowardly and undisciplined soldier with a bad reputation. Alexander confronted him and said, "*Aut nomen, aut mores muta*—Either change your name or mend your manners."

"Are we Christians? Then we ought to think, and speak, and act, in every thing as becomes Christians, and to do nothing to bring reproach upon that worthy name by which we are called.

1 Peter 1:21 says, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

That is why Titus instructs us, "In everything set the world an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about you." (Titus 2:7-8).

The world is looking for that which is authentic. Are you an authentic Christian? Let us live lives of authenticity and character and show the world about us that there are some who call themselves Christians who are for real.

***"Living for Jesus, a life that is true,  
Striving to please Him in all that I do;  
Yielding allegiance, glad hearted and free,  
This is the pathway of blessing for me."***

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