

God's Definition of a "Christian" (1)

Acts 11:26

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Introduction:

- I. Our lesson begins a two-part study of a critical question. The term "Christian" use to be understood. Everyone understood to what group the term referred. In the New Testament times it exclusively referred to those who "belonged to Jesus Christ." These were identified by distinctive beliefs and practices. There was pride in the use of this term. Tragically this distinctiveness was compromised and in our modern time a "Christian" can identify anyone that is moral and considerate – even a Muslim is viewed as just another aspect of Christianity! The distinctiveness that this term demands is lacking in our day. Today the term "Christian" is too vague to really matter. This "morphing" of a biblical word by cultural pressures is wrong. This is why we need to study again and reaffirm God's definition of a "Christian."

- II. Our Bibles are opened to a page in the incredible history recording the explosive expansion of the Church in Antioch, Syria.
 1. The church was est by those scattered by the persecution following Stephen's death (verses 19ff).
 2. This small congregation was destined to serve a vital role in world evangelism. Next to Jerusalem Antioch, Syria is the most famous city of Christianity. From this congregation three missionary tours were launched that changed the history of mankind. Wonderful lessons on missions and benevolence arise from this congregation.

- III. In verse 26 we discover a unique statement – these were the *first* ones called "Christians."
 1. We now read of this term that is probably one of the most overused and misunderstood words in the world's vocabulary – "Christian."
 2. We need a proper biblical definition as a benchmark so we will not improperly use this term.
 3. This term is NOT a nickname that can be applied to anyone professing a "religious" character or slanderously used to cast reproach upon the Church.
 4. The name was identifying a "follower of God." It was a name in which personal pride was found because it identified one as a follower of Christ (1 Peter 4:14-16).

5. This term is hallowed in that it was prophesied that God's people would wear a "new name" (Isaiah 62:2; 65:15).
6. Since this is a name from God, and not from the lips of those speaking derogatorily about the church, we would expect God to define exactly what a "Christian" is. And such is the situation because there are thirteen characteristics of the Christian in Acts 11:19-30.

Body:

- I. A "Christian" is one who has learned God's Truth and believed it (11:19-21).
 - A. Some may ask, "Why were there none called 'Christians' in this city before?"
 1. The answer is simple – no one had heard the Gospel Truth preached in that city before.
 2. One cannot be a follower of Christ, if he has not heard Christ preached.
 - B. Notice two important items mentioned here:
 1. The GOSPEL must be preached (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).
 - a. This is a message from God and not from man. It is a message simple in statement and void of "showmanship" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).
 - b. It is a message that is able to open eyes to God's will and unite mankind in a common fellowship (Isaiah 35:5; 2 Corinthians 4:6).
 - c. In order to be a "Christian" you MUST hear the simple, pure Gospel (2 Peter 2:1-2).
 2. One must BELIEVE the Gospel (Jn 3:16) and TURN to the Lord (Acts 3:19).
 - a. These two separate actions are performed so that salvation can be received.
 - b. "Turning to" – Specifically refers to one's decision to be immersed for the forgiveness of sins. The same idea is found in Acts 18:8.
 3. The Bible is clear in teaching that only those who hear the pure Gospel, believe the Gospel, and turn to the Lord in immersion are recognized by God as "Christians."
 - C. What was true in Antioch is equally true today – ONLY those who hear the pure Gospel, believe the Gospel message, and are immersed for the forgiveness of sins, can be recognized by God as a true "Christian."
- II. A "Christian" is one who realizes he is indebted (11:20).

- A. Someone had to bring the Truth to Antioch.
 - 1. Had these remained in Jerusalem there would have been no church est in Antioch.
 - 2. What would have happened to the worldwide mission efforts had these refugees from Jerusalem's persecution arrived in Antioch but remained silent? They were obligated to seize the opportunity and would be judged because of their knowledge!

 - B. A true Christian realizes he is in debt to all mankind – he owes the them Gospel Truth (Romans 1:14). A "debtor" is one burdened with an obligation to another.
 - 1. 1 Corinthians 9:16
 - 2. Do we really feel "burdened" with our debt?

 - C. A Christian shows he is grateful to those who taught him and is willing to accept the debt that he owes to the world.
- III. A "Christian" is one who "talks" the Bible (11:19).
- A. By their conversation they were defined as "Christians."
 - 1. Implied is the willingness to communicate spiritual ideas and concepts to others.
 - 2. They were courageous enough to speak out for God.

 - B. Have you ever considered that your conversation is able to reveal that you are a Christian?
 - 1. Let us be motivated by this characteristic and also "speak the word" to those with whom we associate.
 - 2. A "Christian" is known by his speech (Ephesians 4:25,29; Revelation 14:5).

 - C. A "Christian" has his speech "seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6).
- IV. A "Christian" is one who is not concerned abt who gets the credit for a job well done (11:19-20).
- A. A group of unnamed people went to Antioch and began a great work there. It was perhaps the most significant congregation in the New Testament. Who established this congregation? Selfless giving characterizes the Christian!

 - B. God received credit for Antioch. God should received credit for

everything we accomplish in His Kingdom today!

1. The praise/glory ought to go only to God (Romans 16:27; 1 Timothy 1:17).
 2. Those nameless multitudes who have been benevolent, begun good works, helped and encouraged others – their names will never be known to mankind, but they will never be forgotten by God in heaven (Revelation 13:8).
- V. A "Christian" is one who never quits (11:19).
- A. These had suffered greatly in the material sense as well as emotionally (11:19).
 - B. Too many people fail to be a proper Christian because they have allowed circumstances to overpower them and cause them to quit. Some quit attending while others still attend but they have "quit" their boldness for God and silently sit.
 1. The basic problem is that we have not yet understood the real value of Christianity – it is worth any cost and God expects us to be willing to pay any cost (Matthew 5:11; 10:34-39).
 2. Let us be prepared for discouragement and determine that the "harder we fall, the greater we will bounce back."
- VI. A "Christian" is one who is IN the Lord's Body, IN the Lord's Church (11:24,26; Colossians 1:18;
- A. The Lord's Church is NOT a denominational church. The Lord's Body is not invisible.
 1. Those in Acts 11 were Christians because they belonged to the church est by Christ in Acts 2 (Acts 2:47).
 2. A member of any other religious body is NOT a "Christian"!
 - B. Are you presently joined to a denominational body that uses creeds, doctrine books, and disciplines in addition to the Bible? If so, the Bible speaks clearly that at this point you cannot be a "Christian" as were those in Acts 11:26. If one is not a member of the Lord's Church then one is not a "Christian."

CONCLUSION:

- I. Friends, the Bible is written for our instruction so that we may be able to look at our lives and examine our lifestyles in worship and service to God. There may be some areas that we need to change in our lives. If so, let us

be willing to change. Let us not become upset with the message and evade the message by appealing to how we have always lived!

- II. The Bible clearly defines who is a "Christian." This is God's definition. A "Christian" is one who ...
 1. Has heard and believed the Gospel (19-20).
 2. Feels a great debt to others to share the Gospel (20).
 3. Speaks the Word (19)
 4. Is not concerned about who gets the credit (19-20).
 5. Never quits (19).
 6. Is IN the Lord's Church (26).

- III. There are seven more characteristics left to consider. Those discussed thus far should be sufficient to cause you to examine yourself so you can see if you are, right now, a "Christian" in God's opinion. You have to be a "Christian" in God's opinion in order to be saved.