

THE NAME CHRISTIAN

In today's world, with all the various churches that claim to follow Jesus the Christ, is there a name which we identify with other than Christian? Many people use the appellation 'Christian' yet their works would suggest they are anything but – is that reason enough for us to stop using the title Christian to identify the faith we follow? In this booklet, we will look at the instances in the Bible where the word 'Christian' is used to help us answer these questions.

The first recorded instance where the followers of the Christ were addressed as Christians is found in Acts 11:26: ***“And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”*** In about the year 40 A.D., good news had reached the church in Jerusalem of a great number of Gentiles believing and turning to the teachings of the Christ. ***“And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.”*** Acts 11:20, 21. The church in Jerusalem then decided to send Barnabas to Antioch. On his arrival in Antioch, Barnabas exhorted to the Gentiles continuously and many more were added to the church. ***“Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.”*** Acts 11:22 to 24. Then, for some reason that the Scriptures give no explanation, Barnabas departed for Tarsus in Asia Minor, and sought out Paul. Barnabas returned to Antioch with Paul accompanying him. For a whole year, these men stayed with the church and taught many people. The same chapter tells us that in those days came prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch. Among the prophets and teachers that came to the church at Antioch, a few are mentioned by name, such as Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, Judas, and Silas. The one thing to pay close attention to in Acts 11 is that the name Christian was not invoked by the people as a slight to the followers of Christ but simply to identify who these people followed. In addition, since the verse says the disciples were FIRST called Christians in Antioch, we know that the disciples continued to bear this title as to who they followed.

The second biblical text using the name Christian is found in Acts 26:28: ***“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”*** This particular event occurred approximately in 62 A.D. which was about 21 years after the incident in Antioch. By King Agrippa making this remark, it implies that there was a community of individuals bearing the title 'Christian' and he knew enough about Paul that he applied it to him. Thus, the king was familiar as to what a Christian believed. Let us read further how Paul responded to King Agrippa's remark: ***“And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.”*** Acts 26:29. Paul clearly states that referring to oneself as a Christian is a badge of honour and that one needs not be ashamed of that title. Paul wished that the king and all that heard him speak could be persuaded to be a Christian as he was; he would not have wished that upon the king if he knew the title Christian was one that a person should be ashamed of.

The last text where we find the title Christian being used is in I Peter 4:16: ***“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf.”*** Peter demonstrates to us that we should be proud of declaring ourselves as a Christian, which means we follow the Christ of God. For further consideration, let us read verses 17 and 18 of the same chapter: ***“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin with us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”*** These last two verses make it clear to us that just because there are others who may claim to be Christians but are truly not, God will deal with them in the day of judgment, thus, that should not deter us from bearing the title. Not all those who assemble in Churches of God will be saved. Notice that it

states that the righteous will scarcely be saved – that means MANY of those who claim to follow Christ will be judged unfit by God to inherit eternal salvation. Peter mentions this in II Peter 2:1: ***“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”***

While we have looked at the instances where the title Christian was used in the Bible, we have thus far not discussed what the word ‘Christian’ means. Simply put, Christian means ‘a follower of the Christ’. The title itself does not imply belief in certain specific doctrines as many churches claim such as a belief in the trinity or the concept of Mary being a perpetual virgin: the churches that hold to such beliefs profess this but that is only what THEY believe a Christian SHOULD believe. Nonetheless, not all those who profess to be Christians hold to such ideologies and they still have the right to use the title if what they believe is what it means to be a Christ follower. No church has the right to prohibit followers of other faiths from using the title simply because they disagree as to the concept of who the Christ is: it will be left to God the Father and His Son who the true Christians are on the Day of Judgment. ***“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. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock ... and every one that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand ...”*** Matthew 7:21 to 24, 26; ***“For MANY are called, but FEW are chosen.”*** Matthew 22:14; ***“To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence...”*** Deuteronomy 32:35a; ***“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”*** Romans 12:9. No church has the right to accuse others of being ‘heretics’ when they themselves do not adhere to the doctrines taught by Christ but create their own ideologies which are not based on the Scriptures.

In conclusion, the title Christian has been shown to be one that followers of the Christ can take pride in, regardless if others use it and mock it by their lifestyle. When we bear it, it tells others that we consider ourselves followers of the Christ of God. The name was applied to the church’s followers to distinguish them from those who held to other beliefs. The bible encourages us to bear the name ‘Christian’, in fact, it was prophesied that the followers of the Messiah would be called after him: ***“And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name.”*** Isaiah 62:2; ***“And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the LORD GOD shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name.”*** Isaiah 65:15.