

A Christian is ...

Do you ever think about our identification as “Christians”? Some today want to lay aside the term, “Christian,” and replace it with “follower of Jesus,” or some other term, for they believe that “Christian” carries with it too much baggage that turns people away from Christ.

Yet the word “Christian” is mentioned just three times in the New Testament. It has been a nickname, and a term of derision and abuse. We use the term “Christian” more than any other to describe one who has trusted Christ for salvation. It is used as both a noun and an adjective (“a Christian woman”). Years ago, the preacher Vance Havner said, “We need more *Christian* Christians.”

So, a Christian is a Christian. The first instance of the word “Christian” is in Acts 11:26, where Luke records this: “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (NASB). This verse reveals that Christians were, first of all, *ones who were taught*. These people were disciples; that is, they were students learning of Christ through the teaching of the apostles. The terms “disciple” and “Christian” are synonymous—they are the same people. They were students (such as the Berean believers in Acts 17:11). Think of us today. We have more Biblical resources available to us than ever before. Do we take seriously the prayer of Psalm 119:11, “Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee”? The early Christians also were diligent to *apply* the truth to daily living (John 8:31). A true Christian cannot pick and choose what to hear, or what he will agree with. He is expected to get all he can, and to apply everything he gets.

A Christian is *one who is compelled*. When King Agrippa was confronted with the claims of Christ by the Apostle Paul, he said, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28). Agrippa realized that to become a Christian would be to be *persuaded* and *compelled* to believe in Christ, for there really is no other answer to the problem of human sin. Paul was intent, even single-minded, in his passion to get the Gospel out to people. He was not a “pussy-footing” defender of the faith (1 Corinthians 5:14). He was compelled to present Christ, for Christ had gripped him and propelled him to do so. In other words, a Christian’s passion for Christ is such because he cannot help it. Early in Acts, the apostles said, “We must obey God rather than men.” They were under divine orders to preach the Gospel,

and could not do otherwise. They were determined to make people understand the message of the Gospel.

A Christian is *one who is persecuted*. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:16, “but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.” It is usual for believers in Christ to come under fire (1 Peter 4:12). We are not to be surprised that we are attacked, subtly or overtly, for our faith in Jesus Christ. Someone has written, “You cannot ultimately escape in the crowd, or shelter under the umbrella of Christ, or register as a conscientious objector in today’s spiritual warfare. Every Christian is a soldier. Every Christian is in the battle.” Acts 14:22 says, “We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.” There is no such thing as “easy Christianity.” And, as Jesus says, we are to rejoice in that fact. We do not trust in our own strength to endure, but in Christ’s strength, for He lives in us, and we are united with Him through the whole adventure. In that way, we become usable for His work.

Through all these things, we claim the term “Christian.” It is a great and grand term for one who loves Jesus Christ. It is not a mark of shame, but instead we embrace it gladly, and we continue in the tremendous line of people who took up the name of Christ through the centuries. We remain optimistic, for we know Who has the final victory.

In the days of the First World War, the French Field Marshal and Allied Commander Ferdinand Foch communicated with his generals, “My right [flank] is broken, my left is shattered; my centre is in retreat. The *situation is excellent*—let us attack!” As Christians, we have no hope in our own strength, but the situation is excellent—let us move the Kingdom of God forward, and beat back the strongholds of the enemy!

Be a Christian in these eventful days!