

WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

By Jerry L. Henderson

The word "Christian" is used 3 times in the New Testament Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28 and 1Pet 4:16. It is both noble and honorable to wear the name of Christ Jas 2:5-7. The "name" the rich were blaspheming in Jas 2:5-7 was without a doubt the name of Christ. The name by which they were called was "Christian" which is a combination of "Christ" and the suffix "ian" and when put together means a follower of Christ. A Christian is more than just a baptized person; church member; weekly worshiper or just a good person. There are many counterfeits, but few that are real or genuine Jhn 8:31

First, we want to consider the origin of the name "Christian". God promised to give a "new name" Isa 62:1-2. It would not be an old name with new significance, it would be a new name. It would be given when the "Gentiles would see the righteousness of Zion. It would be given by the mouth of Lord not by the enemies of the Christians. Isa. 56:5 says it was to be "within my house." God's house is the church according to 1Tim 3:15. Therefore it is unscriptural to call one a Christian who is not in the Lord's church. This name was to be an "everlasting name" Isa 56:5. That means it is to last forever.

Now consider the meaning and use of the name "Christian". As noted above, the name means: a "Follower of Christ" (Thayer's Greek English Lexicon); or an "Adherent of Christ" (Vine's Expository Dictionary). It is not used in Scripture in a hyphenated way as it is used today: such as, "Baptist-Christian; Methodist-Christian or some other man-made name attached to the name "Christian". There are no "conservative Christians" or "liberal Christians", there are only "faithful and unfaithful Christians". The Lord never prefixed or suffixed the name Christian. "Christian" is a noun, not an adjective! Yet the word "Christian" is tacked onto many things - homes, schools, colleges, Sabbath, etc. The term "Christian Atheist." is even used. It is thought if a person is a good moral Atheist, he or she is a Christian Atheist. People even talk about Jewish Christians, but a person can't be both a Jew and a Christian. One can be of Jewish descent but not a Jew from the religious standpoint

Just who are not Christians? Certainly, those not in God's family, the church, can call themselves a Christian. Obviously, someone can appropriate a name and wear it even though they are not entitled to. One could call themselves "Jones" when not in the "Jones" family. They have "assumed" a name rather than it being "assigned" to them because they are a part of the family. Identity theft or the stealing of a name and or the identity of another is a major problem in our society today. Abraham Lincoln is said to have asked: "If you call a cow's tail a leg, how many legs does she have?" Most answered five, but he replied: "No, four, calling a tail a leg does not make it one!" So, neither does calling someone a Christian make them one! Not all "good" people are Christians. Yes, one must be good, but that in and of itself does not make one a Christian. Nicodemus was a good man, but had to be born again to be a part of the Kingdom (the church or family) of God and thereby be called a Christian Jhn 3:1-5. Cornelius was a very devout man but he had to hear words to be saved (which made him a part of God's family and a Christian) Acts 11:14. Not all "religious" people are Christians. Even those who are heathens are religious Acts 17:22. The apostle Paul, before his conversion, was very religious, but he was holding on to what was false Acts 26:5, 9. He even persecuted Christians. So, even though he was very religious he was not a Christian before his conversion. There are, in fact, two kinds of religion, "pure" and "defiled" Jas 1:26-27. Not even all church members are Christians. Just joining or attending a church does not make one a Christian. There are even some who call themselves members of the "church of Christ" who are not Christians Jhn 8:31.

Then just who are Christians? Wearing the name "American" involves duty: such as upholding the constitution, obeying laws, good citizenship, etc. Those who do not obey laws, burn flag, and try to destroy this country we call "un-American" because they are not demonstrating the characteristics of an "American". Wearing the name "Christian" involves a life of duty to Christ. A Christian is something a person IS, not just something they are called. A Christian is a person

who has obeyed the gospel – been baptized for the remission of sins Acts 2:38 and is therefore "in Christ" Gal 3:26, 27

The following are some questions a person can ask themselves in their effort to determine if they are, in fact, a Christian. Have I obeyed the gospel 2Thess 1:8; 1Pet 4:17? One is not a Christian if they have not put on Christ by obeying the commands He has set forth in His Will, the Gospel. Did I obey the gospel out of conviction or convenience Rom 6:17? If a person did what they did just for family, prestige, or for any reason other than their desire to submit to the Lord and His will, they are not a Christian. Am I willing to suffer as a Christian 1Pet 4:16; Heb 10:32-34? A person willing to suffer for something has conviction. A person unwilling to suffer for Christ is not a Christian. Am I separated from the world in recreation, language, conduct, apparel, etc. Rom 12:2; 1Jhn 2:15-17? A person cannot serve God and mammon (material things) Matt 6:24. Am I truly devoted to Christ? Do I love the brethren, or do I have no time for my brethren or others Jhn 13:34-35? Do I attend services as much as I can or as little as I think I can get by with Heb 10:25? Do I give liberally or miserly or do I give the leftovers to God 2Cor 9:6, 7? Am I truly interested in leading others to Christ? Jesus came to seek and save the lost Lk 19:10 and if we are Christians we are followers of Him 1Pet 2:21. Do I appreciate strong preaching or am I offended when the Bible condemns my sins? What is my reaction when error is exposed Gal 4:16; Jhn 6:66? Am I growing in the faith 2Pet 1:5-8? Am I concerned about my spiritual development and that of my family? We are taught that we must "glorify God in this name" 1Pet 4:10-11. Therefore, everything we do must be such as would bring glory to God or I am not a Christian even though I might call myself such.

When our spirit leaves our body, the important question will not be: was he or she rich, a great athlete or a scholar, etc. etc... But rather the important question will be: "was he or she a faithful Christian?" So, are we really Christians, or are we just wearing the name? If you are not a Christian, you can become one by obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ. That means you must hear the Word Rom. 10:17; believe in Jesus Christ Jhn 8:24; repent of your sins Lk 13:3; confess your faith publicly Matt 10:32, 33; and be baptized for the remission of your sins Acts 2:38; 22:16. You will then be added by the Lord to the church, the family of God Acts 2:47 and you will be a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ. There is an old spiritual song that says "everbody talkin' bout heav'n ain't goin' there." There are also a lot of people calling themselves Christians who are not. ARE YOU A "CHRISTIAN"?