

THE NAME CHRISTIAN

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How many times do you suppose the New Testament contains the word “Christian”? Thousands of times? Hundreds? Dozens? Actually, the word appears only three times! But that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t use it. Let’s look at the three passages containing the word “Christian.”

“*And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*” (Acts 11:26). The question arises: Who called them that? Some think Jesus’ enemies coined the name as a mocking insult. However, the wording of the passage shows that none other than God Himself gave them that name.

This peculiar word for “called” is used only nine times in the entire New Testament; invariably, it connotes that God is doing the calling. For example, Noah was “*divinely warned*” to build the ark (Hebrews 11:7). The wise men were “*divinely warned*” not to go back to Herod (Matthew 2:12). Cornelius was “*divinely instructed*” to send for Peter (Acts 10:22). Just so, the disciples of Jesus were divinely named Christians.

Since God gave that name, why wear any other? How disgraceful, to put the name of some religious leader or some peculiar doctrine in front of the name Christian! Can you feature Paul or Peter saying, “I’m a _____-Christian”? (Fill in the blank with a name based on a doctrine or famous leader).

“*You almost persuade me to become a Christian*” (Acts 26:28). So said King Agrippa upon hearing the gospel from Paul. Christianity is the fulfillment of what Moses and the prophets predicted (Acts 26:22, 23), and Agrippa believed the prophets (v. 27). As far as we know, however, the king never obeyed the gospel. How tragic, that one so near being persuaded could not bring

himself to turn from his wickedness, embrace the Lord’s gracious offer of salvation, and wear the name Christian!

Our last passage reads: “*Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter*” (1 Peter 4:16; some translations read “*in this name*”). We give no glory to God when we suffer the just penalties for wrong-doing; but when we suffer for being Christians, we honor Him, suffering for righteousness’ sake (Matthew 5:10-12).

It is becoming less and less popular to be a Christian. Will we ever be called upon to suffer violent persecution as the early Christians did? Only God knows. But whether our suffering is small or great, let us endure it graciously, with a Christ-like spirit. May we wear the name Christian happily, and may we live in such a way as to bring no shame upon it!

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There are only two kinds of men: the righteous who believe themselves to be sinners; the rest, sinners, who believe themselves righteous.

--Blaise Pascal

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Sin has four characteristics:

Self-sufficiency instead of faith

Self-will instead of submission

Self-seeking instead of benevolence

Self-righteousness instead of humility

--Paul Harvey

Fishing For Faith

Christ's followers, and preachers in particular, learn early in their experiences that not all want to be or will be saved. We must console ourselves in our best effort. Though far-fetched, I've compared soul-saving to fishing the many streams and ponds in my boyhood area. Fortunately, I had an uncle who visited most of the favorite spots and had equipment enough for me and my aunt, who not only was avid in hooking, but cooking the fish.

Looking back, it seems I caught a lot, though my age does deceive me at times. But always, it was that one fish that would bite and run, probably a prize winner never reaching the gunwales of uncle's boat. No matter the number before, the imagined prey became the predominant quest, and I'd lose sleep hoping to get him next time.

As God's fishermen, we know that not all will submit to God's will, as noted in the parable of the sower, (Matthew 13). Instances of spiritual demise are inevitable. Yet, as fishermen, we need to go all-out, exerting our maximum effort to win souls to Christ and to retain them, “*snatching them out of the fire*” and saving them (Jude 22, 23).

In uncle's boat, if we'd park too long in one spot, he'd move it on, looking for new prospects, always hopeful for a bountiful catch. Christians need to go all-out to bring the lost to the truth and to keep them there. We've learned human nature can overcome the spiritual nature and will lead to some refusing to return.

But the avid fisherman doesn't stop his action, though a lack of success! He may mourn over "the big one" that got away. But for those once saved, but who've floundered, keep the way open so they are encouraged to return.

--Gordon V. Herrmann (deceased), Santa Maria, CA