

GOD CALLED THEM CHRISTIANS

By Guy V. Caskey

I had rather God would call me a Christian than anyone else. It is nice to have the love, respect and confidence of brethren and friends. No higher compliment could be paid me than for those who know me to say: "He is a Christian." This is far better than having them say: "He is great." or "He is talented." But for God to call a man a Christian is the most wonderful of all compliments. God called the disciples of Antioch Christians for the first time (Acts 11:26).

The prophet Isaiah said: "*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*" (Isa. 62:2). This was fulfilled in the New Testament in Acts 11:26: "*And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*" The word for called in this passage is not the common word, but means, "in the New Testament, to utter a divine communication" (Thayer). So, these early disciples were Christians by a divine utterance. **God gave them this name.**

The world has many standards by which it measures a Christian. You receive a great variety of answers when you ask: "Who is a Christian?" The world thinks that a man who is good morally is a Christian. Morality is important, but there were many good moral people before Christ came and died for man's sins. Others think that a man who is honest, upright, generous and provides well for his own family is a Christian. While all of these things are commendable, and even necessary, they do not make one a Christian. In this study, we are interested in '**Who Is A Christian**' when we use the word of God alone as the measurement. Whom does God call a Christian? This is the all-important question!

WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

Who is really converted to Christ? Peter gives a full and satisfactory answer in the first chapter of his first letter:

1. **One who is an obedient child of God** -- "*As Children of obedience. . .*" (1 Pet. 1:14). The 20th Century New Testament renders this: "*Be like obedient children.*" This refers to "obedience to God's saving will, or to the gospel. It consists in believing in Christ and in following him in love" (Lenski). The expression child of obedience prompts three thoughts: 1) authority, 2) respect for that authority and 3) discipline. Behind obedience is authority and the word itself means "to give ear, hearken, listen to, submission." Peter is saying that a Christian is one who has respect for the authority of God, who listens to what he says and complies with what he commands. He is like a child in submission to and dependence upon his parents. One has not been converted to Christ who has not brought himself to this point of thought and conduct. He can be acceptable to God in nothing until he resigns his own will and surrenders himself without reservation to the will of Christ.

We are living in a time when in the home, the school, society and the church there is a great poverty of this respect for God and his word.

The apostle is warning Christians that it would be a monstrous thing for children of obedience to go back and fashion themselves according to their former furious and wicked desires,

which described the course of their conduct previous to their conversion to Christ. Do not lose sight of the fact that there was the possibility of their doing so, They could apostatize; there was the danger of their abandoning the faith, returning to the world and fashioning themselves after their prior evil lusts and habits. Otherwise the warning issued here would have been meaningless. The consequences of returning to the old castoff lusts are fully defined by the same writer in 2 Peter 2:20-22, *"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them"*. It will help one's position none at all to plead that these people were never saved in the first place. But this verse says that they had been called and had responded to that call of the gospel. "The call is always issued by means of the gospel that comes through those preaching the gospel, v. 12" (Lenski).

2. One who is holy -- *"But as he who has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of living"* (1 Pet. 1:16). The word holy means "separate from the common, one who has been segregated from the world." The man who has been converted is one who has been called out of the world and lives a separate life from the world. Jesus does not wish him to be taken out of the world; he wants him to have association with the world that he might save it; but he does not want him to be any part of the evil that is in the world. *"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken to you"* (Jno. 16:8). *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth"* (Jno. 17:17). Sanctify means "set apart, separate." So, when one, by God's word, has been made clean, separated from the world and lives a segregated life, he is a Christian. A Christian is one who believes in and practices segregation -- not built upon race, color, language, education or economics; but a segregation that distinguishes him from the world, and completely sets him apart from all wickedness and corruption. In every department of his life, his behavior is fashioned after God; his deportment is in the likeness of the life and example of Christ. In Christ, he is a new creature. His life is now dedicated in faithful service to the Saviour. He is easily distinguished from the man of the world. A clear line of demarcation can be drawn between him and the man who still serves sin. If this is not true, then by God's standard, it can be determined that such a person has not been converted, and is not, therefore, a Christian.

3. One who calls upon God as his Father -- *"And if ye call on him as Father. . ."* (1 Pet. 1:17). Peter tells us in this verse who a Christian is. There are two truths apparent in this divine statement: One must have the right to call upon God as his Father; and he must exercise that right. Who actually has a right to call upon God as his Father? The answer is as simple as the question -- the one who is in God's family. Only those who are children of God have the right to call him Father. I have two children. They are in my family. Because they are my children, they have a just claim, by virtue of natural law, to call me their father. It would be a reflection upon me, upon my Christian character, for anyone who is not in my family to call me father. Recently I visited in Haiti, and the children along the streets asked me for gifts of money. One surely thought he had an advantage and would strike a respondent chord in my heart by addressing me as his father. I had never seen him before; I did not beget him; he did not belong to my family. As the physical life is, so the spiritual life is. No man has a right to call upon God as his Father who cannot produce the evidence of his

sonship. He can lay no just claim to this relationship and privilege unless through spiritual law he has come into the family of God. *"Truly, truly, I say unto you, except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"* (Jno. 3:5). This is a prohibitive statement -- that is, it excludes from God's family all who have not been born again of water and of the Spirit. Are you in the family of God? You are not if you have not been born again. And if you have not been born again, you cannot call him Father. You have not been converted; you are not a Christian.

But a Christian is one who, having that right, exercises it. Far too many who have been baptized into Christ and who are, therefore, in God's family have not availed themselves of the wonderful privilege of talking with the Father every day of their lives. A very timely question for each one of us to ask is: "Do I talk with the Father daily? Do I invoke his blessings and give thanks for his goodness to me? To be child of God, a Christian requires constant prayer, *"Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."* I Thessalonians 5:17-18". If I turn to him only because of fear or repeated habit, I have missed the mark and do not measure up to his standard. Or if I repair to God's throne only in time of need or desperation, I rob myself of this immense blessing of the treasure of prayer, of approaching the throne of all blessings. *"There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men. Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it"* Job 35:12 and *"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."* Isaiah 59:2". What power and blessing in talking with the Father! *"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers...."* I Peter 3:12"

4. One who is a sojourner -- *"Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear"* (1 Pet. 1:17). A sojourner is a stranger, a pilgrim, and a temporary resident in a foreign land. The idea in the word is one who dwells beside. It is a fleeting stay one spends in this life: Christians must not loiter on the way; they must press toward the mark. They are but visitants, who will soon be called to the mother country. If truly Christian, our deepest affinities connect us with heaven, for our citizenship is there. It is unfortunate that many Christians do not recognize that they are just pilgrims passing through this world. They get wonderfully attached to it as though it were their home and have no wish to leave it. So involved in its affairs do some of them become, they would prefer to make it their permanent dwelling place. If asked, they may tell you that heaven is their home, but they are not homesick yet. Someone has said: "Were the happiness of the next world as closely apprehended as the felicities of this, it were a martyrdom to live." I once read this illustration: "Two men may embark in one ship -- the one full of good cheer as the ropes are loosed and the first turn of the screw begins to move her from the pier; the other sad because he leaves all that is familiar and dear. The one is going home from exile; the other is being borne into banishment in a strange land, whose speech he does not know and whose king he does not serve. Which shall I be when death comes?"

5. One who has been redeemed in the blood of Christ -- *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your futile way of life. . .but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (1 Pet. 1:18). Redeem comes from a word that means "to loose, set free, deliver for a ransom." Before conversion, we were slaves to a selfish life in which we lived for personal gratification, the free indulgence of our appetites and passions. In that day we conformed to the world with its attractions, its magnetic pull at our flesh and its pride. In that day we conformed to the

customs and opinions around us, our object being wealth or fame; and we gave indulgence to every desire we wished to gratify. We were under the control and dominion of sin. But Christ redeemed us. *"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Matt. 20:28). *"Who gave himself a ransom for all. . ."* (1 Tim. 2:6). Formerly, we were sold into the bondage of Satan and were the slaves of sin, but Jesus came into the world and offered himself as the ransom price that we might go free. He became our substitute to set us at liberty. In the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, the first-born of both animals and men belonged to the Lord. They were to be sacrificed to him. But God made provision that some animals and all men might be redeemed by the substitution of a suitable sacrifice. *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins"* (Heb.10: 4); so, under the New Covenant, God offered his Son to become the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, once for all. A Christian is one who has availed himself of this offer to be redeemed and who has been made free and stands fast in that liberty which Christ purchased for him by his blood.

6. One who believes in God who raised Christ from the dead--*"Who by him do believe in God, who raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory"* (1 Pet. 1:21). Belief in God who raised Christ from the dead is fundamental to our being Christians. Many religious leaders and teachers across the world assert that they believe in Christ. They believe that he was a great man -- in fact, the greatest who ever lived. They tell us that Christ was the most wonderful teacher the world has ever known; that he formulated and gave to mankind the most wonderful philosophy and the highest system of ethics the world has ever possessed. But in the same breath they deny that he was raised from the dead -- and all other miracles connected with his life. No man is a Christian who does not believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. *"Whom God hath raised up. . ."* (Acts 2:24). *"And killed the prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead..."* (Acts 3:15). *"God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities"* (Acts 3:26). *"Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, and by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole"* (Acts 4:10). *"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree"* (Acts 6:30). *"If we believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead"* (Rom. 4:24). *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved"* (Rom. 10:9). One's claim to be a Christian is a farce if he denies the resurrection of Christ. But it is more than a farce; it is downright blasphemy.

Some years ago my family and I were passing through New York City. While there we had occasion to visit Riverside Church out by the Hudson, a magnificent structure of almost unbelievable beauty. In one group viewing the building, a man asked the guide: "What must one believe to be a member of this church?" The guide replied, "He does not have to believe anything." The one making the inquiry thought he had been misunderstood. So, he asked, "Do you not have to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" His response was immediate and very plain: "You do not have to believe anything. Sign this card and you are automatically constituted a member of the Riverside Church." But our standard of measurement is God's word and it unequivocally states that a Christian is one who believes that God raised Christ from the dead.

7. One who has purified his soul in obeying the truth - "*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth. . .*" (1 Pet. 1:22). There are three words to which we shall give notice in this passage: (a) Obedience: Again, the idea of hearing, listening and being submissive is found in this word. It also shows personal responsibility. They had a part in bringing about their own purification. "The apostles were never afraid of referring to human agency as having an important part in the saving of the soul. No one is made pure without personal intention or effort. . . that is, "your yielding to the requirements of truth, and to its fair influence on your mind, has been the means of your becoming pure" (Barnes). (b) Truth: Jesus said, "*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (Jno. 8:32). Let it be observed and remembered that it is the truth, not error, by which men are made free. It is the truth by which men are purified. These passages state that men must know and obey the truth to be made free and to be purified. What Jesus and the apostles taught constitute the truth, the record of which is found in the New Testament. (c) Purified: This word describes the moral and spiritual state into which they entered when they obeyed and in which they are now continuing. They were purified in their obedience to the truth and they continue to be purified by their obedience.

8. One who has been born again -- "*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever*" (1 Pet. 1:23). The term born again tells us that these people were born anew. They had been brought forth again. Their first birth had been fleshly; this one was spiritual. The planting of the incorruptible word of God in their hearts had effected this new birth. The new birth has often been presented as a mysterious, inexplicable process, beyond human grasp. But Peter explains what the new birth is and how it is brought about. He says that we have been redeemed in the blood of Christ. That is God's part. No one can redeem himself. The next step, Peter explains in the afore mentioned verse, is that we have purified our souls in obedience to the truth. This is man's part. Redemption in the blood of Christ, and purification in obedience to the truth constitute the new birth; for it is the same verse that says, "*Being born again. . .*" So, a Christian is one who has been born again of the living and abiding word, the gospel which has been preached to him.

9. One who enjoys the hope of an eternal inheritance -- "*To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. . .*" (1 Pet. 1:4). When one becomes a Christian by being obedient to God's word and continues faithfully in the Christian life, he entertains a hope of a home in heaven. What a wonderful promise, what a sustaining expectation -- an inheritance incorruptible, unstained and unfading. The delight of it will never grow old. It will never lose any of its beauty and richness through sickness on our part or damage to itself. It will never be marred by impurity, but will be enjoyed by the redeemed in one eternal day of gladness.

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