

The Word *Christian*

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Love, faith, grace, pastor, and baptism are Biblical words that are habitually (and grossly) abused and misused. Another such word is *Christian*. In the New Testament it is always used as a noun, never as an adjective (e.g., *Christian church, Christian school, Christian religion*). Modern man indiscriminately misapplies this word to people and institutions.

While it is the most often used term to refer to the religion of Christ as depicted in the New Testament, it is found only three times therein. Let us consider these three usages.

- **Acts 11:26**— “[T]he disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” These were not the first ones to **become** Christians, which distinction belonged to those who obeyed the Gospel on Pentecost (Acts 2:37–41). However, those disciples in Antioch were the first to be **called** by this name, apparently in fulfillment of prophecy (Isa 62: 2; 65:15), rather than in derision by enemies of the Christ (as some allege). Note that *Christian* is used interchangeably with *disciple*, so whatever it takes to become a disciple from Pentecost forward, it takes also to become a Christian. Those whom the Lord adds to His church as they obey Him (Acts 2:47) are called *disciples* (6:1–2, 7; et al.). The **disciples** composed the church (8:1; 9:1), thus the **church** was/is composed of **Christians**.
- **Acts 26:28**— “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” King Herod Agrippa spoke these words to Paul as the apostle related his conversion from zealous advocate of Moses’ Law to the foremost preacher of Jesus’ Law – the Gospel. It is clear that, by this time, some twenty-plus years since *Christian* came into use in Antioch, it was now so well known that this king knew it and knew that Paul was trying to make a Christian of him.
- **1 Peter 4:16**— “[B]ut if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name.” Peter wrote to those being persecuted **because they were Christians**. Those who despise God, His Son, His Word, and His church will always see that Christians suffer for their faith – in every age (2 Tim. 3:12). It is a God/Christ-glorifying name. Peter urges his hearers not to feel the shame of evil-doers, for the name is worth suffering for.

How did those on Pentecost, Paul, those in Antioch, and those to whom Peter wrote become Christians? Acts 2:37–47 holds the answers: People heard the Gospel, causing them to believe in and confess Jesus as the Christ and to ask what they should do (v. 37). Peter told them to repent and be baptized in order to receive forgiveness. The Lord saved from their past sins those who did so and added them to His church (vv. 41, 47). They thereby became disciples/Christians. The Gospel presents no other way to do so.

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