

One Word Study

What It Means to Be a Christian

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Texts: Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:12 – the three times in Scripture where the word “Christian” is found
- B. **[S1]** People have probably **labeled** you your whole life.
 1. Perhaps they label you according to your looks, your style of clothing, things you did in your past, your political persuasion, or the pastimes you enjoy.
 2. Some labels may be ones of which you’re embarrassed, but others are ones of which you are proud.
 3. Think about the labels that you hope people will associate with you. How do you want people to know you? How do you want people to categorize you?
 4. What better word could there be than...
- C. **[S2] “Christian”**
 1. 5546. **Christianos, khris-tee-an-os'**; from G5547; a Christian, i.e. follower of Christ:--Christian.
 2. 5547. **Christos, khris-tos'**; from G5548; anointed, i.e. the Messiah, an epithet of Jesus:--Christ.
 3. “The word Christian comes from the Greek word **Christianos**. The word is actually a combination of the Greek word **Christos** (meaning ‘Anointed One’) and the Latin suffix **-ianos**, which indicated the person was a follower of a leader or slave who belonged to a master.”
 4. **[S2A]** So the word quite literally means, **‘A person who follows, or belongs to, Christ’**” (Mcadams 79).
 5. “It’s probably important to point out, **this seems to be a term coined by outsiders rather than a name Christians came up with for themselves**” (Mcadams 79; yet perhaps also a fulfillment of prophecy of Isaiah 62:2 of a “new name” for God’s followers).

D. This may surprise you, but the word “**Christian**” is only found **three times** in Scripture. Let’s look at these references to see what it means to be a Christian.

I. **[S3] “Christian”(Acts 11:26)**

A. (Acts 11:26 NKJV) And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. **And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.**

B. **Context:** Acts 11:19-26

1. Luke writes about how the persecution of the disciples in Jerusalem causes the disciples to be scattered to several different cities (Acts 8:1; 11:19). One of the cities where the Gospel makes a huge impact is the city of Antioch.

2. **READ** Acts 11:19-26

C. “**Disciple**” – 3101. mathetes, math-ay-tes'; from G3129; a learner, i.e. pupil: -- disciple. It means **a student or follower of Jesus.**

D. “**The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.**”

E. “Consider how **English speakers often label groups of people** by taking a word associated with that group and adding a **suffix** to the end of the word” (McAdams 79).

1. “Sometimes we do this with proper names, like those of a political or religious leader the group follows” (McAdams 79).

2. “Sometimes we do this with the primary philosophy to which the group holds” (McAdams 79).

3. “Although this is sometimes done in a negative or condescending way, that certainly isn’t always the case” (McAdams 79).

4. Examples (McAdams 79):

a. Religiously, we call those who follow the teachings of Martin Luther “**Lutherans.**” We call those who agree with John Calvin’s theology “**Calvinists.**”

- b. In politics, we add a suffix to words like “republic” to label a group of people “Republicans.”
- c. In English, the suffixes **–ist, –ite, and –ian** are commonly used this way. Those of us who live in Mobile are called Mobilians, for yet another example.

F. **“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”**

1. “Although it could have been, it isn’t necessarily meant to be a negative moniker. It could have just been a way for outsiders to differentiate the disciples of Jesus from others” (McAdams 79).
2. Matt Cook in our One Word devotional book wrote:
 - a. “In Acts 11, the church grew rapidly in the metropolitan city of Antioch in Syria. The followers of Jesus create such a splash that the pagans give them a nickname: **Christians**. They are literally calling followers of Jesus **‘the Christ-people.’** Maybe they heard Christians speak so much of Christ that it was the only nickname they could create to identify these strange religious people.”
 - b. **[S4] “But isn’t it powerful? The word Christian ... identified believers. They were the Jesus-people.”** – Matt Cook (136).
3. Matt Cook also asks some pointed questions to you and me: **“How do our friends see us? Do we talk so much about Jesus and represent Him so well that they could legitimately call us ‘Christians,’ or ‘the Christ-people?’ **Imagine the impact we could make on our communities if we legitimately portrayed Jesus in a way that others could think of no other way to identify us than to call us the Jesus-people**”** (136).
4. “We know the early disciples were always talking about the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the ‘Christ.’ In other words, they are declaring to anyone who would listen, ‘Jesus is the “Anointed One,” the Son of David, the King of kings, the Messiah.’ And when a group of people uniquely talk so much about one issue – or one person –

then outsiders are more than likely going to create a label for that group” (McAdams 79).

5. **[S5]** “What do you talk about?
What do you talk about?
Why don’t you talk about Jesus?”
-- VBS Song taught by Matt Presley
6. Imagine... Could it be that outsiders labeled the disciples of Christians because they were always talking about Christ? **What a compliment!**

G. May WE be called Christians!

1. **May WE be called Christians because all WE talk about is Jesus!**
2. **May WE be called Christians** because the One after Whom WE pattern our lives is Jesus!
3. **May WE be called Christians** because WE continually proclaim that **Jesus is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,”** and no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).
4. **May WE be called Christians** because WE continually proclaim that **there is salvation in no other**, “for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

II. **[S6] “Christian” (Acts 26:28)**

A. (Acts 26:28 NKJV) Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

B. Context: Acts 26:22-28

1. In this context, the apostle Paul has been imprisoned and is making his defense before King Agrippa in Caesarea. Agrippa is “familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews” (Acts 26:3), so Paul tells him why he has become a follower of Jesus the Christ.
2. **READ** Acts 26:22-26.
3. Paul pleads with Agrippa to accept the truth about Jesus: (Acts 26:27 NKJV) "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe."

4. (Acts 26:28 NKJV) Then Agrippa said to Paul, "**You almost persuade me to become a Christian.**"
 5. "Though some translations use a question mark, it's hard to tell if Agrippa is saying, '**You've almost persuaded me, Paul.**' Or if he is scoffing, saying, '**Do you really think that you could so easily persuade me, Paul?**'" (McAdams 80).
- C. One application that we learn from this passage: **being a Christian requires a decision**. We must decide to become and to be a Christian.
1. I've known of some through the years that struggle with this decision. They just haven't decided "who they're going to be, who they're going to follow."
 2. If you are a Christian, you must make the decision to become a Christian and to live the life of a Christian.

III. **[S7] "Christian" (1 Peter 4:16)**

- A. (1 Pet 4:16 NKJV) Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.
1. "Peter is writing to this epistle to encourage disciples who are suffering because of their faith in Christ" (McAdams 80; see 1 Peter 4:12).
 2. **READ** 1 Peter 4:12-16.
- B. These are Christians who have "stepped across the line." They have made the decision to **become** Christians, to **live as** Christians, and to **suffer the consequences**. **They have identified with Christ, as belonging to Christ.**
- C. It is reported that **Alexander the Great** singled out one of his soldiers who is accused of cowardice.
1. "What's your name?" Alexander snapped.
 2. "My name is Alexander, sir," came the reply.
 3. **"Well, change your life or change your name!"**
 4. "If we are going to wear the name of Christ by being called Christians, then our lives better reflect Christ. If our

lives don't, then we need to change our lives or change our name" (McAdams 81).

- D. I appreciated very much Matt Cook's discussion in our One Word Devotional Books about "**A Kingdom of Priests**" (140).
1. If you've read it, you'll remember his introduction about discussions that are often enjoyed after an athletic contest – say, a football game. Many of you have been involved in these discussions.
 - a. If our team won, we celebrate and talk about all the things "**we**" did. "**We**" played great. The refs made bad calls against "**us.**" But, all that matters is that "**we**" won the game!
 - b. But as Cook points out, "**We' didn't do anything. We' sat on the bleachers [or on the couch]. The players did the work. They had done the work for months. **We were just spectators**" (140).**
 2. Now watch Cook's application: **[S8]** "Christians can easily fall into the trap of spectator Christianity" (140).
 - a. "**We**' go to church once a week, get excited, but then go home and let the [others] do the real work the rest of the week" (Cook 140).
 - b. **[S8A]** "It's the spectator Christian's job to pay, pray, and get out of the way" (Cook 140).
 - 1) **It's great to "pay."** It's great to support the work of the church financially. The work of the church requires funding. Many of you give so generously. Thank you.
 - 2) **It's vitally necessary that we pray.** "Trying to do God's work without praying is trying to do God's work without God's help." The early church was a praying church. We are completely dependent upon God. It is God who gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6).
 - 3) **But God doesn't want us to "get out of the way" and let someone else do the work.** He wants to work through us. He wants us to

“get in the way” – the “bright and shining way, the glory land way” of actively serving Him by serving others.

2. **[S9]** “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).
3. Some among us would love to be active but they just physically can’t. But what about the rest of us? Are we spectators or participants?
4. **[S10]** Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14).
5. This will include:
 - a. **Getting involved in the ministries of the church.** That’s the work of the church! We can accomplish so much more – together! There’s a lot of joyful fellowship that comes from serving together, too.
 - b. **Letting your light shine wherever you are** – at home, in your neighborhood, at work, among your friends and family – anywhere and everywhere!
 - c. There is so much to be done!
6. **[S11]** “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’” – Isaiah 6:8
 - a. I think God is still asking, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?”
 - b. Will we, like Isaiah, respond saying, “Here am I! Send me!”
7. **[S12]** “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your **good works** and glorify your Father in heaven.” – Matthew 5:16
8. God doesn’t want us to be “spectator” Christians; He wants us to be a **“kingdom of priests.”**

9. Like the people of God under the Old Covenant, the people of God under the New Covenant – Christians, the church – comprise a royal priesthood!
10. **[S13]** “But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” – 1 Peter 2:9
11. **“Christians are not spectators.** We are priests who have special access to god through the blood of Jesus. We are representatives of God intended to ‘proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.’ **Christians are not spectators. They are participants. They are priests”** (Cook 140).

CONCLUSION:

- A. **[S14] “When I Say, ‘I Am a Christian’”**
by Carol Wimmer (NOT Maya Angelou! [ǎngelō])
 1. **The Story Behind the Words:**
 - a. “My heart was heavy in 1988 as I wrote the poem, *When I say I am a Christian*. I had begun to sense increasing societal resentment within American culture toward **the attitude of self-righteousness** that has been adopted by so many Christians. I knew such behavior was, and is, a *distortion* of Christianity. Thus, the sentiment of the poem was born out of my personal awareness of this distortion and the heartache it causes in society.
 - b. Tears rolled down my face as I jotted down my thoughts with an inner determination to define the Christian spirit as I wished to experience it. But, the words flowed out of me with such ease that I knew it was God’s spirit moving in my heart. I was simply holding the pen. The resulting words formed a reflection of my own beliefs and the reputation I hoped to secure for myself.
 2. **[S14A]** When I say, “I am a Christian,” I’m not shouting, “I’ve been saved!”

I'm whispering, "I get lost!
That's why I chose this way"

3. **[S15]** When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I don't speak with human pride
I'm confessing that I stumble —
Needing God to be my guide
4. **[S16]** When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I'm not trying to be strong
I'm professing that I'm weak and
Pray for strength to carry on
5. **[S17]** When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I'm not bragging of success
I'm admitting that I've failed and
Cannot ever pay the debt
6. **[S18]** When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I don't think I know it all
I submit to my confusion
Asking humbly to be taught
7. **[S19]** When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I'm not claiming to be perfect
My flaws are far too visible
But God believes I'm worth it
8. **[S20]** When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I still feel the sting of pain
I have my share of heartache
Which is why I seek His name
9. **[S21]** When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I do not wish to judge
I have no authority —
I only know I'm loved.

- B. Wes McAdams: "I think it is interesting that when we talk about being a Christian today, we are usually thinking in terms of individual salvation and forgiveness, and that is certainly part of what it means to be a Christian."

1. **[S22] “But the word *Christian* has much more to do with being in submission to the kingship of Christ.”** – Wes McAdams (79)
2. **“The early Christians talk about the kingship of Jesus.** They are calling the entire world to bow in obedience, reverence, and awe before the Son of God, the King, Jesus the Christ. Thus, they are labeled ‘Christians’” (McAdams 79).
3. “It seems many people today want a Savior, but they don’t want a King....”
4. **[S23] “A Christian is someone who allows Jesus to be both his Savior and his King”** (McAdams 79-80).

C. **[S24]** (blank slide)

SOURCES:

Cook, Matt. “Christians.” One Word. Mt. Juliet, TN: Mt. Juliet Church of Christ, 2016. 135-140.

McAdams, Wes. “Christians.” One Word Study Guide. Mt. Juliet, TN: Mt. Juliet Church of Christ, 2016. 79-81.

“When I Say, ‘I Am a Christian’” (the correct, full title) was penned in 1988 by [Carol Wimmer](#), was first published in the Assemblies of God periodical *Hi-Call Gospel Magazine*, and has subsequently been anthologized in several books (including *Chicken Soup for the Christian Family Soul*.) Unfortunately, over the years the work has been reprinted on the Internet with either missing or incorrect attributions (most often being ascribed to “author unknown” or the aforementioned Maya Angelou), and with verses that have been rearranged or altered by others. – from Snopes.com