

can only rightly be applied to someone who has heard the gospel's message, believed in Jesus Christ, repented of sin, confessed Christ, and been baptized for the forgiveness of sin. Sadly, many of the "Christian" churches today do not believe, teach, and practice this plan of salvation.

**Someone who is living as a follower of Jesus.** Being a Christian is not a one-time decision or mere worldview. Rather, the Christians were true followers/disciples of Jesus Christ (Acts 11:26). These were people who demonstrated allegiance to Christ in becoming Christians – and then remained true to the Lord with devoted hearts (v. 23). They assembled with other Christians (v. 26), lived the kind of life devoted to Christ like Paul lived (Acts 26:29; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17), were willing to suffer for Christ (1 Peter 4:16), and were devoted to glorifying God in their lives (1 Peter 4:16; 1 Corinthians 10:31). So, as Jesus taught, those who become His disciples must continue to learn more about His will for their lives (Matthew 28:19-20). For, true allegiance to Jesus Christ is not determined by one merely professing allegiance to Him, but by faithful obedience to Him (Matthew 7:21-23)! While those who are Christians are not perfect in carrying out the faith, they are those who are striving to have the Spirit of Christ in them so as to be like Jesus (Romans 8:9-11)!

**Many other terms used to identify a follower of Jesus.** While the term "Christian" is commonly used today, there are many other terms used in the Bible that help Christians understand their identities. For example, Christians are disciples (Acts 11:26), temples of God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), members of the Way (Acts 9:1-2), ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20-21), soldiers of Christ (2 Timothy 2:3-4), instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:12-13), lights of the world (Matthew 5:14-16), priests of God (1 Peter 2:4-5), servants (Matthew 20:26-28), etc. Studying each way the Bible refers to followers of Christ will help you create a more complete and Biblical understanding of your identity in Christ (i.e. of being a Christian).

### Conclusion

Being in Christ means that you are a Christian. But, as we have seen, this term must not be used in many of the ways that are common today. Rather, this term refers to people who have believed and obeyed the gospel initially and are now faithfully following Jesus Christ. This one must be deeply aligned with Christ so as trying to be like Him in every way.

Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Written by Eric Krieg

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## You Are A Christian

It is common to hear people call themselves "Christians." In fact, this term is so commonly used, it's meaning has evolved into many things. Take a moment to consider the ways you have heard this term applied. An improper use of this term, though, can do a great deal of damage. So, as God has clearly inspired the use of this word as an identification of those who are in Christ (Acts 11:26), we need to use and apply it properly (1 Peter 4:11).

The purpose of this lesson is to learn what it means for a Christian to be a Christian so you can embed this into your identity in Christ.

### Misusing The Term "Christian"

**What's the harm?** I have already mentioned the fact that misusing the term "Christian" can do damage. For example, it can distort what it means to be in Christ (i.e. by becoming a title more than an identity). Next, it can create a false sense of what it means to be a Christian (i.e. by causing a false impression that one is a "Christian"). Then, it can cause great confusion among those who do not profess to be Christians (i.e. by creating a bad reputation for "Christians"). Now, consider a few ways the term is commonly misused.

**A worldview.** There are many times the term "Christian" is used in a cultural sense. For example, someone who has a general belief in God and Jesus Christ may identify himself/herself as a "Christian." But, this may not be because there is a deep allegiance to Christ. Rather, it is just a favorable outlook on God and Christ. These basic beliefs (and perhaps some other "Christian" values) have been chosen above alternative worldviews (i.e. Atheism, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.). This use of the word "Christian" is particularly common in places where it is culturally less

acceptable for people to have a different worldview (i.e. culturally unacceptable in a community, a family, a business, etc.).

**A religion.** There are many times the term “Christian” is used to identify a broad set of religious values and beliefs. For example, there are many types of churches that are identified as being “Christian.” So, this use of the term goes deeper than the previous one. While the previous one possesses a mere worldview that is favorable toward “Christians,” this one may actually attempt to practice some form of a “Christian” religion in his/her life (i.e. be part of a church, worship, read the Bible, pray, and try to live out the beliefs and values he/she has come to accept). In this use of the word, it has often come to embrace a wide variety of different religious beliefs, teachings, and practices among people who profess to believe in and follow Jesus Christ (i.e. there are tens of thousands of different kinds of “Christian” churches today).

**A brand.** There are many times the term “Christian” is used as an adjective to describe some object, experience, or service. For example, according to this usage, there is/are “Christian” bands, music, schools, colleges, books, movies, magazines, charities, organizations, businesses, homes, etc. Some have even applied this term to entire populations/groups (i.e. “Christian” nation, family, etc.). According to this use of the term, the word is used to describe non-living things or entire people groups. Although these may be favorable to those who are “Christian” in the previous senses of the word, they often fail to truly and fully represent the beliefs and values that are taught in the Scriptures.

### How The Bible Uses The Term “Christian”

**Biblical references.** Although the word “Christian” is common today, it may surprise you to learn that the Bible only uses this term three times! Let’s consider each one carefully.

(1) Acts 11:26. In verses 19-21, the gospel of Jesus Christ had been taken as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch by those who had been scattered due to persecution (Acts 8:1-4). As this message spread, a large number believed and turned to the Lord. When news about this reached the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to encourage them to remain true to the Lord and even more were added to the Lord (vv. 22-24). Then, Barnabas and Saul assembled with the church in Antioch for an entire year – and the disciples there were called “Christians” for the first time (vv. 25-26).

(2) Acts 26:28. After standing trial before Governor Festus, Paul stood before King Agrippa (of the Jews). During this, Paul spoke about his

conversion and how he had been obedient to Christ. Although Festus accused Paul of being out of his mind (v. 24), Paul appealed to the fact the king knew he spoke with truth and good sense (vv. 25-26). Then, Paul asked whether Agrippa believed (knowing he did, v. 27). Yet, Agrippa refused to become a Christian (v. 28, the precise language is difficult to interpret). Still, Paul’s desire was that all who heard him would become a Christian like he was (except for the chains he had, v. 29).

(3) 1 Peter 4:16. In this text, Peter tells followers of Christ not to be surprised when sufferings come on them as if it was something unusual (vv. 12-13). Then, they were to recognize the blessings of such suffering for Christ rather than suffering for any other cause (vv. 14-16). For, they were to be comforted by the fact that God’s household (those who are Christians, the righteous) would be saved with difficulty (i.e. sufferings), but those who are ungodly and sinners would be eternally condemned (vv. 17-18). So, those who were Christians were to entrust themselves to God and do what is good (v. 19).

**Key takeaways about the word “Christian.”** As you consider how the Bible uses the word “Christian,” notice a few key points. First, the word always refers to people (never a thing, an organization, a nation, or an idea). Second, it is used in reference to a specific type of person (someone who is a follower of Jesus Christ, Acts 11:26). Third, there was only one variety of Christians (not a broad-range term to describe people who held a common belief in Jesus but yet believed, practiced, and taught many different things).

### Living As A Christian

**Someone who has obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ to be forgiven of sin.** Both the Acts 11 and 26 passages help us to understand that a person who is truly a Christian is someone who has taken certain steps to become a Christian. So, a person is not a Christian by just having parents who are Christians or by being around others who are Christians. Those disciples who were called Christians in Acts 11:26 were those who had believed the gospel of Jesus Christ and turned to the Lord (vv. 19-21, 26). Also, Agrippa had to believe and become a Christian (Acts 26:28-29). This fits with what Jesus taught about the process of making disciples (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). When His disciples would go and teach the gospel, those who believed and were baptized would be saved and be counted as His disciples. This is the same picture of people turning to Christ we see in many other places throughout the book of Acts (Acts 2:37-38; 8:12-13; 8:35-39; 18:8; etc.). So, the identification of “Christian”