

## *Being A Christian*

**By Mark Hatfield**

Everywhere you go, people are claiming allegiance to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by saying, "I am a Christian". Many of those who proclaim such fail to realize what it means to be a Christian. What does the Bible say about one truly being a Child of God? How can you know if you are living up to what God has called you to be? What can I use as a guideline to make sure I am doing God's will? Let us look to God's word, as we examine the three times the word "Christian" appears, and gather lessons from their contexts.

### TO BE CALLED A CHRISTIAN

The first time that we find individuals called Christians, is in the book of Acts after the church was established. In Acts 11:26, the Bible records, "...And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." A first point that must be established is that in order to be called a Christian, you had to be a part of the Lord's church (Matt. 16:18). Those who were added to the church were baptized into this one body (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:24). Once they were added to the church, they were then faithful "disciples". Notice that they "assembled" together for worship, and surely did those things that were pleasing to God. Therefore we must conclude that one must be added to the church in obedience to the gospel, and must be a faithful disciple in order to be called a Christian.

### TO ALMOST BE A CHRISTIAN

One of the best ways to determine whether one is a Christian, is to look at one who was "almost" persuaded to be a Christian. By looking at what hindered this man from being fully persuaded, will help us to see what it takes to truly be a Christian in our own lives. In Acts 26:28 the inspired word says, "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.'" We sometimes use the old saying, "Almost only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades", and this shows to be true here. Either you are a Christian, or not. In Agrippa's case, he was not. The reason he failed to be fully persuaded is seen in how he responded to the gospel. In Acts 26:25, Paul was speaking the "words of truth" and even asked Agrippa in verse 27, "Believest thou the prophets?" Paul knowing he believed the word of God, was hopeful for his becoming a Christian, but he would not mix with faith the words that he heard (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 4:2).

When others in the Bible heard the word of God they were fully persuaded. In Acts 2:36, Peter finished a main point in His sermon by saying that the very people standing there were guilty of the sin of killing the Son of God. The people being convicted or as the text says, "pricked in their heart", asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). When Peter told them, "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38), they could either be fully persuaded and become a Christian, or simply be almost persuaded. In this case the text says, "Then they that gladly received the word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). Those that failed to accept these words were among the almost persuaded. From this text we learn that in order to be a Christian, one must

be in obedience to the gospel, and not merely a hearer only (James 1:21-22; Hebrews 5:9).

#### TO SUFFER WHILE BEING A CHRISTIAN

The last reference to the word "Christian" is found in I Peter 4:16. The text says, "...if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." It has been said that if you do not suffer as a Christian, you are not living the life of a Christian." The idea being that some just want to say they are a Christian, yet will not live that life in opposition to the ways of the world. Everything they do in life is simply to fit in with the crowd and even after years of claiming to be a Christian, nobody else knows about it. We are called to have an expressive faith (Matt 5:16). We are warned about the potential suffering we might have to bear and the sacrifices we might need to make (Matthew 5:10-12; Luke 14:26-27). If these kinds of sufferings are not found in your life as a "Christian" , you may want to examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith (II Cor. 13:5) From this point we learn that in order to be a Christian, we need to be willing to suffer for the cause of Christ, with true faith.

Are you a Christian? These three points should help you to make sure!