

“CHRISTIAN CONFUSION”

Acts 11:25-26

INTRODUCTION:

- A. There is much confusion about “Christians” in America.
 - 1. Some reports (The Montclair Times, January 8, 2009) indicate that tough economic times are causing more Americans to turn to God in time of need.
 - 2. Another report (Christian Science Monitor, March 9, 2009) says that Americans are drifting away from religion, with 10% fewer Americans calling themselves Christians than the number in 1990.
 - 3. That is confusing.
- B. It is also confusing to see the various ways that many people consider themselves “Christians.”
- C. If you read the papers and magazines or watch news outlets you get the idea that there are a variety of definitions or ideas concerning what or who is a Christian.

I. TO SOME: A CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES.

- A. If you are from the Western Hemisphere or if you are a U.S. citizen to much of the world you are a Christian.
- B. Many would divide the world into Israelis, Muslims and Christians.
- C. I have an issue with that definition simply because it is not true. There are many people in our part of the world who are not Christians.
- D. Where you are born or your nationality does not make you a Christian.

II. TO SOME: ANY GOOD MORAL PERSON.

- A. While I hope and would think that all who claim to be Christians are good moral people, not all good moral people are Christians.
- B. I know some non-Christians who are morally good, and regretfully some are more moral than a few who claim to be Christians.
- C. Consider the example of CORNELIUS, Acts 10, 11.
 - 1. He was “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.” *Acts 10:2*.
 - 2. He was religious, followed his instructions in sending for Peter, had his family gathered together to hear God’s message.
 - 3. But he was not a Christian. He had to be taught and had to obey through baptism in order to become a Christian and please God, *Acts 10:47-48*.
- D. It takes more than just being a good moral person, so we can reject that definition.

III. TO SOME: AN “ADHERENT” TO A CHURCH.

- A. ADHERENT:

1. Supporter of a cause or an individual.
 2. A person who has membership in some group, association or religion.
- B. A friend of mine attended a large denominational church in a town where I was preaching early in my preaching a career.
1. I asked him how many members were in the church, and he gave me a huge number, well over 1,000.
 2. I knew something didn't sound right, so I asked him how many were in attendance at their services. On Sunday morning, they had about 400, and less than 200 on Sunday night.
 3. They had many on the "church roll" but few in attendance.
- C. There are many who hold membership in a religious organization, yet are not active, do not attend and do not support it in any way.
1. But simply adhering in this sense is not enough.
 2. That would be like someone saying they were an avid fisherman, but does not own a pole or hasn't fished in years.
- D. You might be on a "church roll" but that doesn't mean you are on "God's roll" – The Lamb's Book of Life.

IV. TO SOME: ONE WHO BELIEVES IN JESUS.

- A. This is partially true.
1. Christians are believers (we'll discuss this later), but there is more to being a Christian than simply stating mental acceptance.
 2. One can believe that Jesus was real and even that he was Christ, but if he/she does not allow Christ's teaching to change his/her life are they really a Christian?
- B. There are many who would say that "faith only" is all that is necessary for salvation.
- C. The Apostle Paul wrote most of the NT. Many have scoured his writings in an attempt to justify "faith only."
1. However, Paul never used that phrase. Not in Romans, his great writings about grace, not in Ephesians, nor Colossians. Paul simply never used the term.
 2. But James DID use that term in his writing.
 - a. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. James 2:24 "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." NIV.
 3. So James uses the phrase "justified ... by faith alone." But it should be noted that he uses the term in order to refute, not support the concept.
 4. In the same chapter he depicts the devils (a little humorously) as "believing (God) and trembling," **2:19**.
 5. "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" **James 2:14**. The answer to that rhetorical question is NO.

6. James concludes the thought and the chapter by writing “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” **James 2:26.**

D. Faith is a good start, but what does the Bible say is necessary to be a Christian?

V. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

A. A CHRISTIAN IS A DISCIPLE.

1. "At Antioch the disciples were first called disciples." Acts 11:26.
2. By definition a disciple is: a student, learner or pupil.
3. A Christian is to follow Christ's teaching, learn from His doctrine, and cling to what he learns from Christ.
4. A Christian follows in Christ's footsteps, learns from His way of life, and clings to the example He left for us.

B. A CHRISTIAN ACTS ON BELIEF, Acts 26:27-29.

1. Paul tells Agrippa that he knows the king believes, the king responds by telling Paul that he is close to becoming a Christian.
2. A Christian is a believer, but this belief is not simply acceptance but it is saving faith.
3. Faith that does not obey in action is not faith.
4. Belief that is only a verbal statement is not belief. to be a real faith, belief must be reverent, trusting and obedient.

C. A CHRISTIAN IS ONE WHO OBEYS GOD.

1. “though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,” **Hebrews 5:8-9.**
2. What if one REFUSES to obey?
“and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” **2 Thessalonians 1:7-8.**
3. Therefore one who does not obey the gospel is not a Christian and will NOT be in heaven.

D. HOW DOES ONE OBEY THE GOSPEL?

1. **Romans 1:16** says the Gospel is God's power to save.
2. The gospel is the D-B-R of Jesus, **1 Corinthians 15:1-4.**
3. We simulate the D-B-R of Jesus when we are baptized, **Romans 6:3-4.**
4. We must follow the teaching of Jesus, John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Matthew 10:32-33; Mark 16:15-16.

CONCLUSION:

- A. Who is a Christian? One who obeys the Lord.

B. Now for the ultimate question; Will you become a Christian this morning? Acts 22:16.

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