

April 23, 2017

Series: "Christian: It's Not What You Think" (based on a series from Andy Stanley)

Today: "Brand Recognition"

Today I am beginning a new series called, "Christian: It's Not What You Think"

Everyone knows what an American is

Everyone knows what a Canadian is

Everyone knows what a Comedian is

But what about this word... "Christian" – what is a Christian?

Your definition may not be the same as someone else's. As a matter of fact if you were to ask people on the street if they were a Christian you would get different answers.

Some may say (to the question are you a Christian), "yes," some may say, "No," some may say, "What do you mean? Some might say, "Yes, but..." or "No, but..." and some would say, "I am but I'm not like that group!"

Some of say they became a Christian, what does that mean. How do you become a Christian? I've heard people say they were born a Christian, the family they were born in told them they were Christians, therefore they are. Or they may have practiced a form of the Christian religion growing up.

Others when they say they became a Christian mean that they said a sinners prayer at one time and became a Christian. Others would say they were baptized – either as an infant which they don't remember, but were told they were baptized, or they remember a baptism at a later age, but the baptism made them a Christian. Some would say they took a class or their parents made them take a class, like a Confirmation class and after the class they became a Christian.

There are different "Brands" of Christianity. And whatever your brand you believe or were taught that your brand is the only true brand of Christianity. I was taught that growing up, from the brand I was a part of that "We were the only true Christians, and everyone else was going to hell.

Some people might say, "I was a Christian, but I'm not anymore." Maybe as a teen or at some other point in their life they decided they would no longer be Christian. Others would say there is no such thing as a "was" Christian; because once a Christian, always a Christian. Some believe that, but there are others who believe, no that's not right, you can be a "was" Christian. You can change your mind or stop believing or go out and make a habit of sin once again and stop being a Christian. And some might even struggle with the question, "Am I or am I not Christian?"

For some being a Christian is about what you believe, for some being a Christian is about how you behave. Some associate with the term Christian but don't believe or behave.

Some hate Christians, they want nothing to do with anything that has the name Christian in it, ... ok here is how they (according to Andy Stanley) define Christians: "Judgmental, homophobic, moralists who think they are the only ones going to heaven and secretly relish the fact that everyone else is going to hell." If you don't feel this way, you know people who do. And, you may look at that definition and not like that definition yet think, I understand where they are coming from, and I don't want to be that.

That's why if someone comes up to you in the street and asks if you are a Christian (which no one probably will) you want to say, "yes, but can I qualify that because I don't want to be that" (as defined by Andy Stanley).

Now here is the good news and the bad news. The good news is that none of what we have just talked about is described in the bible as Christian. The bad news is everything you thought about Christianity or being a Christian is wrong and that's what we are going to look at this morning. As a matter of fact some of what we are going to talk about today may cause you to go home dust off your Bible and open it to check out what I say today about the term Christian (and if I get you to open your Bible that's a good thing).

Here's the thing; the term Christian or Christians is only used three times in the Bible. It's not defined, in fact what we are going to discover today is that the word Christian was actually a derogatory term used by those outside the Jesus community to describe the Jesus community and was never used by the Jesus community to describe themselves.

It was like, geek or red neck, actually I can think of worse terms than that but I can't use any other example without offending someone. But it's like when we look at a group who dress the same and like the same music, and act the same and have the same habits and we say eww, then one of the "eww" people come up with a derogatory term to describe this group they don't like and says, yeah your one of those people. That is actually where the term Christian came from.

This is why it only appears in the New Testament three times and each time it is used by outsiders describing this group of people who were all acting the same way, following the same person. Let me give you an example of that from the Book of Acts.

The Book of Acts tells us about what happened after Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven. It's the story of how the church got started. The section we are going to look at comes after persecution broke out against people who believed that Jesus was the Savior, the Messiah. Messiah is the Hebrew word and Christ is the Greek equivalent of Messiah. Both Christ and Messiah mean the same thing, "The Anointed One."

The believers in Jesus as the one anointed by God to be Savior began to be persecuted by those who did not believe Jesus was the long awaited Savior, Messiah, Lord.

Stephen was the first to be martyred for his belief in Jesus. He was persecuted and stoned to death and Saul who later became known as Paul and wrote much of the New Testament, was there when Stephen was killed. After that Saul himself became very involved in the persecution of these believers in Jesus causing many to be arrested and killed. But eventually he became a follower of Jesus himself.

After the death of Stephen, because of the persecution they were facing in Jerusalem, many of the believers left scattering to many other areas including Antioch about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. In Antioch they told the Greeks/Gentiles/non-Jews, "hey something miraculous happened in Jerusalem a man Jesus was crucified and then rose from the dead, we saw him and not only us but many others saw Him too." And a large number of these Roman minded people embraced this knock off of the religion of Judaism and turned to the Lord.

When word got back to the church in Jerusalem (Peter, John, Jesus' brother James) they sent Barnabas to Antioch, "you've got to go and check this thing out and get back to us." When Barnabas got there and saw the evidence of this and the large numbers who believed he was filled with joy. But he also felt he needed reinforcements so he goes to get Saul who became Paul. And this is where we get some insight to the word Christian.

Acts 11:25-26 (NIV)

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, (Saul was from Tarsus so Barnabas goes there to Saul's home town to get him)

and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. (A church had been started and a great number of people were in that church. Then check out this next phrase, this is Dr. Luke who is keeping a careful record of these things throughout this whole period of history and look at what he notes)

The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

The disciples (we'll get back to that) were called Christians by who? By the ones looking on, the disciples did not call themselves Christians, but were called Christians. This was by the "eww" people, saying look at those, those ... Christians. The disciples did not call themselves Christians it was a label put on them.

We also have proof of this from outside the Bible. Ever hear of Tacitus? (say yes and feel smart like me when I learned more about him this week). Tacitus lived from 55 A.D. to 120 A.D.. He wrote about several Roman Emperors including Nero. In 64 A.D. Nero did an interesting thing. He wanted to rebuild a city so he burnt down the old one. This didn't go over very big with the people who didn't think kindly of having their homes and businesses burnt down to the ground and so Nero blamed the Christians. Tacitus wrote about this:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace.

- Cornelius Tacitus

The Christians weren't calling themselves Christians, they called themselves something else. The populace, the public, the outsiders looking in, they coined this term. "Bunch of ...Christians!"

Jesus was being called the Christ (Messiah or anointed of God to bring Salvation). The populace hearing that took it to be Jesus' last name. Like His mother would have been Mary Christ, and His brother, James Christ, He was Jesus Christ. But it was His title not a last name. Because they were speaking to Greeks they referred to Jesus using Christ instead of the Hebrew, Messiah. The people heard, "We worship Jesus Christ, we follow Jesus Christ. So the general public thought it was His last name and referred to them as Christians. Just like today we have those who follow Martin Luther we call them Lutherans, or followers of John Wesley, we call Wesleyans, and so the public gave them the name Christians. The Christians did not call themselves Christian, no. But... they called themselves something far more terrifying, something far more defined, something far more convicting than Christian. The reason you can't get five people to define Christian the same way, the reason there are so many spin offs to Christianity, so many denominations, and cults; the reason you can take any issue and you will have Christians on both sides of that issue. The reason people can live just about any way they want and still call themselves Christian is because there is no place in the Bible you can turn to and say, "see it says right here what a Christians is. "Christian" and "Christianity" is not defined in the New Testament.

But there is a term that is used very consistently to describe these people who were part of this Jesus movement. It's a terrifying term, it is this word... **Disciple**. And the reason it is so terrifying is that it is so clearly defined in the New Testament. You can do anything in the name of Christianity; you can go to war in the name of Christianity. You can do all kinds of things in the name of Christianity. But I'm telling you, you lock into this word, Disciple, you look into this word in the New Testament...and oh, my goodness. Look again at Acts 11:26b

The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

The disciples were called Christians. Think about it, If you would have asked them what they called themselves they would have said disciple, not Christian. Look throughout the New Testament and you are going to see this word Disciple over and over. Now what is a disciple? A disciple is a learner, a pupil, a follower, an apprentice. They do this they look to the one they are learning from, the one they are following after and ask, "I am trying to make a decision, how would you handle this?" Then they respond, "ok then that is how I will handle it." They ask, "What would you do in this situation, oh, then that's what I will do. Where would you go?" "Then that's where I will go?" "What would you do if you were me, oh, then that is what I will do." "How would you manage this

relationship, then that is how I will manage it.”

A disciple says to the one they follow, “Tell me what you want me to do, and by the way, I want you to know that before you tell me, the answer is yes... yes... yes.” “Now what is it you think I should do?”

Whoa...see, that is much different than Christian isn't it? Disciple is much more uncomfortable. But this is the word you see over and over again in the New Testament. Look at a few examples:

Acts 6:7 NIV

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Not Christians but disciples

Acts 9:26 NIV

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

Remember Paul was arresting and killing the disciples of Jesus, so they weren't sure if they could trust him. So when he came and tried to join the *disciples* (not Christians) they were afraid not believing he was really a *disciple*.

So the point so far in this series is that we can hide behind the term Christian, but if you ask yourself who were these people and how did they define themselves, they referred to themselves and each other as disciples. Which brings us to this terrifying, disturbing question:

**Are we disciples?** ... Or are we just Christians? Are you a disciple of Jesus or are you just a Christian? Are you a follower of Jesus, is your answer yes ... it doesn't even matter what the question is the answer is yes! Or are you a ... “Christian.”

Before we close I want to take you to a moment in time with Jesus when He speaks specifically to people who want to be disciples. And He gives them the “ok if you want to be a disciple and not just a Christian here is kind of the bottom line. Here is your specific, specific marching orders.” Are you ready? And let me tell you if we could get this right, if we decided we are not just going to be Christians but decided to be disciples; if we could get this one element of Jesus' teachings; if followers of Jesus just kept this one teaching of Jesus (which I am about to read); if we just got this one part of being a disciple right our world, and in particular our nation would be a different and better place.

Jesus is at the end of His ministry, He is about to have His last Passover, His Last Supper with the disciples. Judas has already left to betray Him. Jesus knows His time

is running out to be with His disciples (the 12 apostles). So He gathers these guys and He says, okay, this is it, you have to get this one thing. Here it is...

John 13:33 NIV

"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

And when He says you cannot come Peter perks up and thinks, "What do you mean I can't come? Wherever you go we go, we are disciples. Does Andrew get to go? Because if Andrew is going I'm going." So Peter is just obsessed with this. You're going somewhere, why can I come, if you're going I'm going, Are you sure we can't come? And Jesus moves on and says...

"A new command I give you: Love one another.

John 13:34a

New means something you never heard before. That's not a new commandment, that is an old commandment. It's even in the old testament. How is it new? They had heard Jesus say it before. So what is new about it? What is new is the "How."

As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 13:34b

"Matthew, remember when I saw you at the tax collectors booth? Your own people considered you a traitor. They hated you, Matthew, they didn't want to talk to you. Peter, do you remember what I did?"

Yes, you took us to a party at Matthew's house with people we're not supposed to hang around with."

"That's right, do you remember how I loved you Matthew? Love like that!"

"Nathanael, do you remember what you said about me when you heard I was from Nazareth? You said, 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from Nazareth?' You dissed my whole family. Remember how I treated you? I spoke well of you and said, 'come on follow Me, be one of my guys.' Love like that!"

"Remember when you thought I was teaching cannibalism, when I said you must eat my flesh and drink my blood? Remember how my disciples grumbled about this and were offended. Many turned their back on me and no longer followed Me. What did I do? I didn't stop loving them. Be honest guys you wanted to leave me to, but I forgave you. Do you remember? Love like that!" That's how I want you to love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another. That's what I want to characterize your relationship with one another.

And then He said this:

By this

By this one thing, by this one dynamic

By this all men will know that you are my... (what's the next word?)

disciples, (there it is!)

You see we can all be Christian but love one another as Jesus loves? You can't get around that. And then just in case they missed it - By this all men will know that you are my disciples ...

if you love one another."

John 13:35

So I know you're all Christians, are you disciples?

Now here is my favorite part of the passage. I mean this is big, right, Jesus just says this ...It's not how much you know, it's not if you go synagogue every Saturday, or even how much you pray. It's how much you love one another, I mean this is a big deal... And Peter raises his hand, "yeah, Peter what ya got on your mind?"

Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?"

John 13:36

It's like, "Peter, did you just miss the whole point of this lesson?" And Peter is like, "Yeah, while I'm your disciple and I want to be with you, and I want to follow you? I am going to be wherever you are." And Jesus would have to remind him that in a few hours a young girl would intimidate him enough to deny he even knows Jesus. Peter says, "no way, I would die for you." And Jesus says, "Look, Peter, I don't want you to die for Me, I want you to do something way more difficult than that." Peter says, "what could be more difficult than dying for you?" Jesus say, "I want you to love these guys, for the rest of your life. I want you to love them in such a way that people on the outside will be drawn to peer in and say, 'Look how they love.' I want you to create a community that is defined by that kind of unconditional, compassion, ridiculous, who would do that kind of love.

"I want outsiders to look at you and say wow, look how they treat one another. Look at how they respect one another, look at how they talk to one another and about one another. Look how they treat widows, and sick people, and poor people. Look at how they love." And Jesus says, "I want you to build communities like that."

And people are going to say, "You know I don't know if I want to become one of those but I'd like to work for one or hire one to work for me. Look how honest they are. I don't know if I want to be one, but I would like others to treat my daughter the way they treat

women. I would like my daughter to be treated and loved the way those men treat and love their wives; I don't know if I want to be one but I want my son to be honored and respected the way those wives honor and respect their husbands. Look at the way they love.

Could you imagine? If we just got that one thing right. Could you imagine if we said forget about Christian, we are going to be a disciple? Could you imagine if we just worked on getting that one thing right? Not all of the New Testament but if we just worked on loving one another as Christ has love us. Image if we said I want to love the people around me starting here treating them the way that Jesus treated those who followed Him?

Can you imagine if just in our families, husband, wife, children we decided that for the next 3 months we are going to serve, and care, and zip our mouths shut and really love one another, can you imagine?

Can you imagine if every believer in our town decided that we are going to love the people around us the way Jesus loved the people and accepted the people that were around Him. Could you just imagine what would happen?

Jesus knows, we could talk about a lot of Biblical teachings, on marriage or anything else, but Jesus said this is the one thing, the one distinguishing characteristic; this is how others will know you are really my follower. Not how long you pray, not how loud you preach, not what you do on Sunday morning, but how you love each other.

Why don't you try that this week, I know your wife is a wreck, and your husband is a mess, and your teenagers are teenagers, and your parents don't have a clue. I know there are idiots all around you and you are the only balanced person you know. I recognize that. What would it look like in your world to love those people the way Jesus loves you?

How about for the next week you did not take your cue from anyone around you about how you treat them. But by the best of my ability, by God's grace I am going to love others no matter how I'm treated. Not as a means to an end, not I will fix you, not I'm going to do this and my spouse is going to be a different person. Is not that, it's that this is what it means to follow Jesus. This is better than Christian. This is way better than Christian.

And let me just say that if Christians have messed it up for you, you look at how they act and you don't want anything to do with Christianity, I get that I really do. But don't let them be a cause for you to miss Jesus. Don't miss Jesus the one who died for you and for me. The One who gives life, abundantly.