

"They Were Called Christians"
Acts 11:26
(Preached at Trinity, February 1, 2006)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we travel through the Book of Acts we find the church continuing to grow. Multitudes are being saved. God has included Gentiles in His work of grace. As these believers went from city to city they brought with them the Gospel of Christ. A particularly rich harvest of souls was taking place in the city of Antioch. The Church of Jerusalem sent Barnabas to check on this new ministry.
2. Arriving at the new church at Antioch Barnabas rejoiced when he saw the evidence of God's grace upon these Gentiles. He immediately began to teach and encourage these new converts. Because of the magnitude of the work he traveled to Tarsus and convinced Paul to help him in the work at Antioch. They went together to Antioch where they ministered for a year.
3. We find at the end of **Verse 26**,
"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."
4. This is one of the three times the title Christian is used in the New Testament
 - A. At first the title Christian was probably coined by unbelievers in contempt of Christians. It means "The party of Christ" or "Christ ones."
 - B. In **Acts 26:28** King Agrippa used it in a derogatory manner:
Acts 26:28 – "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."
 - C. In **1 Peter 4:16** Peter tells believers not to be ashamed of the title.
1 Peter 4:16 – "Yet if *any man* suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."
5. As time passed Christians proudly wore the title – it became a badge of honor. Throughout history this has been the title that identified the followers of Christ.
6. Today, however, the title "Christian" has lost much of its significance, mainly because multitudes wear the name who bear no evidence of Christian conversion. Obviously few in our generation know what a Christian is.
 - A. Most Americans profess Christianity. Almost no one believes he is bad enough to go to hell
 1. People believe they are Christians if they believe in God and try to live a good life.
 2. People believe they are Christians because they were raised in the church.
 3. People believe they are Christians if they have made a decision for Christ.
 - B. Part of the problem lies with a diluted Gospel that has replaced Biblical preaching.
 - a. Expository preaching has been replaced with story telling, drama, and Christianized Psychology.
 - b. Biblical faith and repentance has been replaced by a superstitious prayer

c. True discipleship has been replaced by a Christianity that makes no demands.

C Jesus presented Christianity is a narrow way - See Matthew 7:13-14
Matthew 7:13-14 – “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴ Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

- Wide is the gate that leads to destruction – Many are on this path
- Narrow is the way that leads to life – Few are on this path

7. What exactly is a Christian? Tonight I want to answer that question.

I. A Christian is one who has seen the reality of his own sin

A. Christianity presumes the guilt of all men

1. We are all born with sin - Original sin - Romans 5:12

Romans 5:12 – “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:”

a. We sinned in Adam

b. Universal guilt – Romans 3:23

Romans 3:23 – “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”

2. Personal transgressions

a. We have a corrupt nature - a bad heart

b. We all quickly manifest our sinful hearts – we are rebels by nature.
We despise authority – we despise God

c. We love our sin – John 3:19

John 3:19 – “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

B. A Biblical Christian is one who has come to an understanding of God’s perfect justice - God's Justice - **Romans 6:23** - "The wages of sin is death"

1. The Biblical Christian sees himself guilty

2. The Biblical Christian sees himself deserving of hell

3. The Biblical Christian is someone who has been humbled before God – someone who understands his own unworthiness before God

4. We are talking about personal responsibility – I have sinned

II. A Christian is One Who Has Found the One Remedy for His Sin

A. Jesus Christ

1. Jesus Christ as He is revealed in the Bible

2. Divine justice could be satisfied by none other

3. The Biblical Christian finds Jesus precious

B. The Cross

1. Imputation - substitutionary atonement

a. Our sins pardoned

b. His righteousness imputed

2. Divine justice satisfied (propitiation)

- C. The Christian is One Who Has Complied With God's Terms For Dealing With His Sin - Faith & Repentance
- Acts 20:21** – “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”
1. Both are made possible by the new birth
 - a. Sin left us without any ability - spiritual death left us unable to understand spiritual things
1 Corinthians 2:14 – “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”
 - b. Left to ourselves we would simply go on sinning
 2. Faith - From the Greek word πίστις (Pistis) - faith, belief, trust
Spurgeon’s Catechism: Question #69
 - a. Faith is trusting in His provision alone and to none other
 - b. Faith is being persuaded that Jesus died for you and you died in Him.
 - b. The danger of spurious faith - "the devils believe and tremble"
Believing in the facts without a change of heart
 - c. Genuine faith is always accompanied by a transformed life
 3. Repentance.
 - a. Repentance involves a person coming to a recognition of his sins against God resulting in a deep grief and sorrow
 - b. True repentance involves a sincere hatred of sin and a turning from it to the righteousness of Christ.

III. The Biblical Christian has undergone a radical transformation

- A. His life has been turned upside down
- 2 Corinthians 5:17** – “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”
- J.C. Ryle described the transformation – the difference between the old life and new: Once he could see no beauty or excellence in the Lord Jesus Christ, he could not understand some minister speaking so much about Him. Now he would tell you that Christ is the pearl of great price, the chiefest among ten thousand, his Redeemer, his Advocate, his Priest, his King, his Physician, his Shepherd, his Friend, his All.
- Once he found no pleasure in the means of grace. The Bible was neglected. His prayers, if he had any, were a mere form. Sunday was a tiresome day. Sermons were a weariness, and often sent him to sleep. Now all this is altered. These things are the food, the comfort, the delight of his soul.
- Once he disliked earnest-minded Christians. He shunned them as melancholy, low-spirited, weak people, now they are the excellent of the earth, of whom he cannot see too much. He is never so happy as he is in their company. He feels that if all men and women were saints, it would be heaven upon earth.
- Once he cared only for this world, its pleasures, its business its occupations, Its rewards. Now he looks upon it as an empty, unsatisfying place, an inn, a lodging, a training school for the life to come. His treasure is in heaven. His home is beyond the grave.

- B. He is now defined by love – love marks him.
1. He understands Christ’s love for him and it changes everything
 2. Paul said, **2 Corinthians 5:14** – “For the love of Christ constraineth us
Charles Hodge says of this verse - "It is being so constrained by a sense of the love of our divine Lord to us, that we consecrate our lives to him."
Piper: “It presses in on us; it grips and holds; it impels and controls. It surrounds us and won't let us run from it. It cages us into joy.”
 3. We now love Christ with our whole heart
 We now love other Christians as our true family
- IV. The Biblical Christian has died to self
- A. We are intimately united to Christ
1. When He died, I died.
 2. We are prepared to die for Him who died for us – our own lives are no longer precious to us
Colossians 3:2-3 – “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”
 3. Suffering is often the lot of being a Christian
1 Peter 4:16 – “Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.”
 4. Self denial is an inseparable aspect of being a Christian
Matthew 16:24-25 – “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. ²⁵ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”
- B. For the Christian the world is no longer precious to him
1. The world fades in the light and glory of Christ
 2. We have found a much greater treasure
 3. We now serve the living Christ
- V. A Biblical Christian is one who perseveres
- A. Many today see Christianity as being part time and temporary
1. Being a Christian is good if it’s convenient – if it fits their schedule
 2. They may attend church, carry a Bible, sing loudly – yet their lives are no different
 3. If hard choices are to be made their Christianity is quickly set aside
 - a. They will easily break God’s law if necessary
 - b. They are still in love with this world – the deceitfulness of riches
 4. If they are called upon to suffer they abandon Christianity completely
- B. The Biblical Christian presses on in every circumstance
1. Christianity is not just about beginning well – its about ending well
Matthew 10:22 – “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.”
 2. Christianity is described as a war to be waged, a race to be won, a fight to be finished

- C. We are charged to stability –
1 Corinthians 15:58 – “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”
1. This demands that we be people of uncompromising principle
 2. This demands that we press on through every difficulty
 Perseverance is never passive. It is an active pressing on even in the face of every difficulty
 3. With such a glorious expectation what possible trivial matter of the earth shall we allow to turn us? How shall we set our affections upon things of the earth?

Conclusion:

1. This is Biblical Christianity
 - A. A Biblical Christian is someone who has come face to face with the reality of his own sin and sees Christ as his only hope.
 - B. A Biblical Christian has come to terms with God’s demand for salvation:
 An absolute trust in the work of Christ alone
 A complete turning from our sins as we turn in absolute submission to God
 - C. A Biblical Christian has been radically transformed – he is a new creature
 - D. A Biblical Christian has died to self.
 - E. A Biblical Christian presses on in perseverance.
2. Any other Christianity is counterfeit. Any other Christianity stands accursed before Christ.
3. May God grant us to continue to press on as we are fueled by a true passion for Christ.