What Do You Call a Christian?

Scripture Reading: Acts 11:19-26

What's in a name? We often identify things by giving them names and titles. We develop terms to define things. If we don't know the original meaning for a name or title, our understanding of that thing will become confused. As time progresses, other things will be labeled by the same name or title. This will add to the confusion. It is possible to lose track of the original idea, because of the way the use of words changes over the years.

Let's use the word "buck" as an example. Spanning a period of over 1000 years, the word "buck" begins as a term for a male goat or deer. The French have a term   for "scapegoat" (Leviticus 16) that resembles our word "buck." Later, we pick up Middle English, Middle Low and Middle High German and we find connotations of Lye and the act of washing or bleaching clothes in lye. Those who tan deer hide will do a soaking process called "bucking the hide."

Today, many male animals are referred to as "bucks" – from rabbits, to rats, to kangaroos! Because of the association with male deer, "buck" is a term that can describe shoes, knives, and dollars. "Buck" is also used to describe a man's character and disposition. References to "buck," as a noun or adjective, can be used in poker, politics, construction, and the military.

"Buck" is used as a verb to describe animal behavior. It also is used for human behavior.

- To "buck" for something means to strive for improvement.
- To "buck" against something means to resist or fight against something.
- To "buck up" means to become more cheerful or vigorous; to renew your efforts.
- "Passing the buck" means blame-shifting or trying to get out of responsibility to do something.

"Buck" is used as an adverb to denote something that is stark – in a state of completeness, or absoluteness. (e.g. "buck naked"). "Buck" can be a person's   last   name   or   first name. Just imagine someone from another country coming up to you and asking you what does the word "buck" mean. It is possible to write two pages of definitions with examples!

Now, consider the difficulties when we think of the word **"Christian."** It has become a confused term. It started 2000 years ago, as a title of derision by non-Christians. The Greek word means, "belonging to the party of Christ." It refers to those who follow Christ

(his example and teachings). It is used by those who want to identify with Christ. It is used by others who want to categorize people religiously or culturally. It is used of those who are baptized and/or belong to organizations called Christian (usually churches, but not always). Throughout history, certain cultures or countries have been designated "Christian." So, some people might be called Christians, simply because of their ethnicity or nationality.

The word "Christian" is used to describe people who use only the Bible for their convictions of faith and living. The same word can describe people who have not read the Bible, or read it very little, and believe whatever their church or priest says. Yet, others, called "Christian," might mix the teachings of Jesus with Buddhism, Bahai, or other religions and philosophies. There are "Christians" who fight and go to war. Others are complete pacifists. There are "Christians" who are very strict. There are others, whose lives are no different than non-religious people. Some "Christians" talk about their faith. Others get angry and defensive if you bring up the subject. Some go to church regularly, others seldom, or not at all. There are even "Christians" who participate in seances and other occult-like behavior. There are so many variations of "Christians," that books could be written – have been written, expressing all the differences.

So, now that we have considered what in the world are Christians. **We need to find out what God calls a Christian.** We must consult the Bible and stick with the Bible for that. Concerning the Jews, Paul tells us "… they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Romans 9:6). We might also say, "they are not all Christians, who are of Christendom." It is necessary, that we have reasons, from the Bible and evidence in our lives that we are truly Christians. If we are careless about this, it could be a disaster. Consider Matthew 7:13-23; II Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 1:6-10; James 2:19-20; Jude 1:3-4; II Peter 1:2-11; I John 5:10-13.

There are only three times the word "Christian" appears in the Bible. The first two times, it is used by unbelievers (Acts 11:26; 26:28). Peter adopted the term and told us that, if you willingly identify with Christ, you are likely to suffer for it (I Peter 4:16). What other terms describe a true Christian? Let's not get confused with all the denominational names. We need words from the Bible, from Christ and The Apostles; from God's Spirit (John 5:24-25; 6:63; 10:27-28; I John 4:1-6). Here are ten words or phrases from Scripture that we will consider: Saved, Justified, Redeemed, Reconciled, Born Again, Child of God, Brother/Sister in the family of God, Disciple, Saint, Servant/Slave of Christ.