

# The Antioch Christian

Acts 11:19 – 30

## I. Intro

- A. **Illustration:** Number of years ago Time magazine carried a story about a controversy that stirred up in a Waterloo, Iowa courthouse over the question, “What is a Christian?” It all started when a local doctor who had been very wealthy died, and when his will was read it was discovered that he had left a large sum of money to be distributed to the Christians in town, specifically—and I quote, “...to persons who believe in the fundamental principles of the Christian religion, and in the Bible, and who are endeavoring to propagate the same.”

Well, when the will became public, a dispute grew over exactly who in town were Christians and therefore worthy of a share of the doctor’s money. Suits and countersuits were filed, and eventually the court was given the responsibility of settling the issue. Each of the ministers in town who had staked a claim was called in to appear before the judge to be interviewed in order to see if they were in agreement when it came to exactly what, “Christianity’s fundamental principles” were. There were representatives of all the various denominations, Baptists, Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists. In fact, even a few Unitarians showed up.

Well, as you can imagine, there was a big difference of opinion in that courtroom about what it meant to be a “Christian.” I’m sure the discussion of who deserved the money was very interesting!

- B. Some ideas put forth today as to what being a Christian means – sound ridiculous:
- i. 1) Has to do with the country you live in
  - ii. 2) Determined by political party you side with
  - iii. 3) Being born into a “Christian” family (this raises the question now, What is a “Christian” family)
  - iv. 4) If you’re not Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, or Jewish by default you’re Christian
  - v. 5) Belonging to a specific denomination – Ex. You’re Christian if you’re Baptist, but you’re not if you’re Episcopalian (realize at last count there were 267 different types of Baptist)
- C. Today, want us to see where the name “Christian” was first used and why the people were called Christian – happened at the place called Antioch
- D. Early believers called “Christian” because their behavior, activity, speech was like Jesus Christ; literally meant “follower of Christ” or “belonging to the party of Christ”; used to distinguish between followers of Christ and worshipers of Caesar; term of mocking and ridicule

- E. **Antioch, city located in ancient Syria, or Phrygia; during this time under Roman rule – very important Roman military, commercial, cultural center**

## II. **They Speak Out**

- A. **\*\* SLIDE \*\*** Every Christian should be known for their declaration and sharing of the Gospel of Christ
- B. **READ Acts 11:19 – 21**
- C. **Remember the story of Stephen back in Chs. 6 thru 8 – one of original 7 men (deacons)**
  - i. **Stephen doing many miraculous signs**
  - ii. **Elders and teachers of law in the Synagogue have him arrested**
  - iii. **Brought before High Priest – Stephen recounts for them from Moses to Solomon how the temple of God came to be, but that God cannot be contained in houses or any structure built by men**
  - iv. **Uses words of prophets to back up his claims**
  - v. **Acts 7:51-52 (NIV)**
    - 51 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!
    - 52 Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him--
  - vi. **These religious leaders become irate, drag Stephen out of the city, and stone him**
- D. **After stoning of Stephen - Acts 8:1 (NIV)**
  - <sup>1</sup> ... On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. **(the reference in v. 19)**
- E. **Might think these early believers that scattered because of persecution were cowards, but all part of God's plan for the Gospel to spread throughout the world; dispersion because of persecution brought great benefit when it came to the Gospel message**
- F. **v. 20: *speak* – word used to mean just normal conversation; men didn't go to Antioch "preaching" the Gospel, the just shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ through normal everyday conversation**
- G. **One identifying mark of these first Christians was they were not afraid, even in the midst of persecution, **to speak out**, to be witnesses and tell others about Jesus**
- H. **If sharing the Gospel just depended on full-time ministers or missionaries it would be severely limited; every believer, everyone who calls themselves**

**Christian should have strong sense of their responsibility to serve the Lord and be His witnesses**

- I. **v. 21: *The Lord's hand was with them ...***
- J. **Therefore, here in Antioch these early believers were called Christian; Christians are people not ashamed **to speak out****

### III. **They Stand Out**

- A. **\*\* SLIDE \*\*** Every Christian should be known (stand out) because of their demonstration of love and grace
- B. **READ Acts 11:22 – 26**
- C. **v. 23: When Barnabas arrived at Antioch what he saw - ... *the evidence of the grace of God***
- D. **Question: How is the grace of God seen in people?**
  - i. **In their countenance, their appearance, their expressions**
  - ii. **In their conversation; Colossians 4:6 (NIV)**
    - <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.
  - iii. **In their conduct; these early believers were first called Christian in Antioch because they acted differently than everyone else; 1 Peter 1:13-15 (NIV)**
    - <sup>13</sup> Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.
    - <sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.
    - <sup>15</sup> But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;
  - iv. **1 Peter 1:13-15 (MSG)**
    - <sup>13</sup> So roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear, be totally ready to receive the gift that's coming when Jesus arrives.
    - <sup>14</sup> Don't lazily slip back into those old grooves of evil, doing just what you feel like doing. You didn't know any better then; you do now.
    - <sup>15</sup> As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness.
- E. **Therefore, here in Antioch these early believers were called Christian because **they stood out** in their demonstration of love and grace to one another and to others**

### IV. **They Shell Out**

- A. **\*\* SLIDE \*\*** Every Christian should be known by their devotion, dedication to giving (how many just turned the volume off on their ear drums)
- B. **READ Acts 11:27 – 30**
- C. **v. 28:** Told a man named Agabus (referred to as a prophet from Jerusalem) brings news of a severe famine about to come on the whole Roman territory
- D. **Question:** What do these early Christians do? Do they put on their prayer list or start a prayer chain? Do they form a committee to determine the best way to handle this? Do they start stockpiling food for their own benefit? No – they immediately take up an offering
- E. **1 John 3:17-18 (NIV)**
  - <sup>17</sup> If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?
  - <sup>18</sup> Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.
- F. **Notice:** Not the parent church sending money to the mission church, it's from the mission field to the home church
- G. So these early Christians were people that saw a need and quietly, spontaneously, without pressure were will to **shell out** in order to meet the need – their giving was instinctive, didn't have to be contemplated over
- H. **Biblical truth:** God will pour out His blessings on a generous people
- I. Therefore, here in Antioch these early believers were called Christian because they were always willing **to shell out** generously

## V. Close

- A. **Question:** So I wonder, when we refer to ourselves as Christian, what does that mean to those in this community?
- B. **Question:** Are we considered Christian just because we attend a Baptist church instead of a Buddhist or Hindu temple, or a Mosque, or a Jewish synagogue?
- C. **Question:** Are we considered Christian just because we live in South Georgia – or just because we live in what's considered a predominately Christian community?
- D. **Question:** Are we considered Christian just because our relatives consider themselves Christian?
- E. **Question:** Or, are we considered Christian because we're not ashamed to speak out for the spreading of the Gospel, we stand out because of the evidence of love and grace seen in us, and we're willing to shell out generously for the cause of Jesus Christ?

F. **Question:** If you were put on trial today accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Would you be seen as an “Antioch” Christian?