June 19, 2020 Devotional

Let us ponder these verses from the book of Acts:

*“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.” Acts 11:25-26*

What does the name Christian mean? Prior to Jesus’ disciples being named Christians, followers of Jesus were called the Way (Acts 9:2). The name Christian literally means “*belonging to Christ.”* It occurs only three times in the New Testament – twice in the book of Acts and once in I Peter. The name was first applied to followers of Jesus in the city of Antioch, located in modern day Syria. The first Gentile Christian church was founded here. Antioch was the home base for the apostle Paul during his missionary journeys.

In another instance, Paul was attempting to convert the Judean king to become a follower of Jesus. King Agrippa of Judea asks the apostle Paul*: “Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?”*  We find the third occurrence in the letter of I Peter: *“Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.”*

How does one become a Christian? We find the answer in chapter 10 of the letter of Romans: *”If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. No one who believes in him will be put to shame. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

Becoming a Christian begins with repentance, telling God you are sorry for your sins, asking for forgiveness, expressing your need for God and dedicating your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. It also includes the sacrament of baptism. And the spiritual journey begins.

When we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, God gives us four extraordinary gifts: **First,** the gift of forgiveness of our sins. Our guilt is erased forever. We are in a right relationship with God. Our past is forgiven. The slate is wiped clean. **Second,** the gift of eternal life. Scripture says*: “The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*  By God’s grace in Christ *w*e have the assurance that we shall one day be with the Lord in heaven. **Third,** the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is a new power in us to guide us, and encourage us and strengthen us. God gives His Spirit to live inside us. **Finally,** we are given a gift or gifts, special abilities or talents to use for God’s purpose and glory. Scripture says: *“God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. The gifts we possess differ as they are allotted to us by God’s grace, and must be exercised accordingly.”*

Following Christ is all about confessing that *“In life and in death, I belong to God, whom I know in Jesus Christ.”* I believe Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world. I trust my life and my future to Christ. I will worship one God, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A Christian is also, through baptism, a member of the church. Christians both believe and belong. Christians are members of God’s family, the people of God, the community of faith, the Body of Christ, of which Christ is head. We are called to love, pray for, care for, serve with, and worship as a fellowship. Ephesians 2:19 says*: “You are members of God’s own family, and you belong to God’s household with every other believer.”*

Billy Graham was asked*: What does it mean to be a Christian? Is it a person who was born in a Christian home?* Billy Graham replied: *“No, I could be born in a garage, but that does not make me an automobile. You can be born in a Christian home and have fine Christian parents, but it does not make you a Christian. You cannot inherit Christianity. "Well, Billy, how about a person who lives by the golden rule, isn't that a Christian?" “Not necessarily he replied. A Christian is a person in whom Christ dwells.”*

What does being a Christian mean to you? The name may not be the most popular name today, but it is our name, and it is the Name above all names.

God’s grace and mercy be with you,

Rev. Alan W. Deuel