

THE FIVE ADJECTIVES OF A NOUN CHRISTIAN

What exactly is a “Christian?” What does the word really mean? It is time to make Christianity Christian again. Bruce Larson tells of the guide who was hired by some hunters to take them into the backwoods of Maine. After some days, they became hopelessly lost and quite naturally began to doubt the competence of their guide. “You said you were the best guide in Maine,” they reminded him. “I am,” he said, “but I think we’re in Canada now.”

You are no longer a guide when you yourself are lost. You are no longer a Christian when you cannot recall what it is that makes you a Christian in the first place. For those of us who would be followers of Christ, the most basic question we need to ask ourselves is “What is a Christian?”

We are living in a world where there is now virtually a “Christian” everything. Look around you. There are now Christian counseling centers, Christian comedy clubs, Christian dance clubs, Christian athletes, Christian coalition’s, and Christian bookstores. How about the 20/20 segment on used-car salespeople- “I’m a Christian salesman,” protested one gentleman, while the camera captured him doing the very things he said he would never do. Or the head of a Christian Militia calling the Oklahoma City bombing: “As fine a piece of art as any Rembrandt painting.”

In our culture today, that word “Christian,” in too many people’s minds, stands for everything Jesus didn’t stand for. That is why pastor and writer Gordon MacDonald has had it with the word “Christian,” which he says “Hardly means a thing any longer.” He says he never uses the word anymore and has developed his own word to replace it- “Christ-follower.”

Let me be as forceful with you as Paul was with the Thessalonians when they got something wrong about what it means to be a “Christ-follower.” From a biblical standpoint, I can state categorically that: I am not a Christian man. I am not a Christian scholar. I am not a Christian parent. I am not a Christian patriot. I am not a Christian anything. I am a Christian. Period.

Check out Acts 11:26, the first time the word Christian appears in the Bible: “It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians. The word Christian began as a noun, not as an adjective. The word, used three times in the New Testament, means literally “Disciple of Christ.”

Why should Christian never be an adjective? What do adjectives do? They modify nouns. Adjectives modify things that are larger and more important than they are. Adjectives LIMIT nouns; they qualify nouns; they distinguish nouns. Adjectives are ornaments and lights you hang on nouns so that nouns become more alive and meaningful.

When Christ is an adjective in our lives, and not a noun, we are only a half-baked believer, not ready to take our place in the kingdom. When Christ is an adjective, not a noun, Christ becomes a label we stick on the surface of our lives- our lust, our greed, and our chauvinism.

Christian is always a noun. It is itself the subject. In many ways, there are only two heresies: the notion that Christian faith is an adjective and the notion that Christian faith is a verb. The church needs a noun consciousness again. But nouns do need adjectives; even more important, nouns need verbs. The isolation of things and thoughts from actions has been a serious mistake in the history of the Christian church.

Here are just a few suggestions for the kinds of adjectives we should use to modify—that is, strengthen, enliven, and invigorate—our already established noun consciousness and noun identity. If the chosen are known by their choices, each one of us needs to choose what adjectives we will put with that noun “Christian.” Here are my choices, my five adjectives of a noun Christian, presented David Letterman style.

5. They’ll know we are Christians by our... good looks. I want to be a good-looking Christian. Christians are a people of good looks. Christians are people who have taken a good look at themselves, searched for the truth about them. Christians are people who have taken a good look at the cost of discipleship; they have looked life full in the face and have decided to go for broke.

4. They’ll know we are Christians... because we’re “too much.” I want to be a “Too-much” Christian. The religious establishment of Jesus’ day found him “Too much for them.” Too much passion; too much compassion; too much forgiveness; too much giving, and too much love. To turn things around, Jesus taught that we must turn things upside down. Jesus turned the values of the world upside down and inside out. People will find us “too much” for them. Why? Because we, like Jesus, will make a difference in the world. We, like Jesus, will turn things upside down and inside out. Indeed, the ultimate test of any theology is the difference it makes in the world.

3. They’ll know we are Christians.... By our “Make-your-day” style of living. I want to be a “make your day” Christian. We need fewer Clint Eastwood Christians (Make my day) and more make-your-day Christians. Christians are people who try to make the day of every person they meet. Christians are people who make every person they meet glad to meet them. They bring joy to every encounter. Christians are people who treat like kings people they don’t even have to be nice to. If I’m a “Make-your-day” Christian, then I go cheek to cheek rather than eye-for-eye. If I’m a “Make-your-day” Christian, then I go the extra mile.

2. They’ll know we are Christians.... Because we’re NUTS (Never Underestimate The Spirit). I want to be a “NUTS” Christian. I don’t happen to like fruitcake but a fruit cake brings fruits and nuts together. That is what Christ does: He helps us bear fruit and become NUTS.

1. you all know what the number one adjective is for that word Christian. We sing it many times. They'll know we are Christians by our LOVE. But wait a minute. That four-letter word "love" has become almost as unusable as that word Christian. It has become so sticky and greasy and gooey from everybody fingering it, one almost hesitates to pick it up. So let's see if we can clean it up. Let's hitch another word to that word love that will cleanse it of all false connotations and make it feel clean and wholesome again.

They'll know we are Christians by our... Calvary-Love. I want to be a CALVARY-LOVE Christian. Christians are Calvary-love people. They worship a God who loves without limits. Do we want to be changed into the likeness of God? Then we must love like God loves, and Jesus said that by this kind of love, "People will know you are my disciples." They'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Calvary-Love.

5. I want to be a good-looking Christian.
4. I want to be a "too-much" Christian.
3. I want to be a "Make-your-day" Christian.
2. I want to be a "NUTS" Christian.
1. I want to be a Calvary-Love Christian.