

“Do We Deserve Our Name?” **Acts 11:19-26**

Several months ago one of my high school classmates met me for lunch in the little town where we grew up. We had not seen each other since 1955, so we had a lot of things to discuss. After lunch we drove around the little town and stopped at the old site where our school used to stand. (The area is now a parking lot.)

At that school, we had a practice of calling each other nicknames – nice nicknames that usually fairly well described the person. Mine was “little one” – a nickname given me by the Methodist preacher in that little town. (Boy, if they could only see me now as I am committed to losing the extra pounds I have gained through the years!) I was so little in those days that the school did not have a basketball uniform to fit me. Mother had to make mine!

Recalling that experience reminded me that the Book of Acts tells us that the disciples of Christ were first called “Christians” at Antioch. And that name “Christian” was a nickname – literally meaning “these little Christs.” Why were these disciples given that nickname? From my study of the New Testament and especially the Book of Acts, I believe I know some of the reasons why the disciples were called “Christians.” I will share two reasons:

1. The early disciples were called “Christians” because they believed in Jesus Christ and – in spite of the dangers of that day – they did not care who knew it. As a matter of fact they made it the business of their lives to make sure everyone knew it. Do we really believe in Christ that much today?

Several years ago, one of my wife’s sisters who had polio as a child was a patient at one of the local hospitals in Statesville. Another sister’s husband and I decided to visit her on a Saturday night. When we asked if she needed anything, she told us that she was craving fruit. The nurse said O.K. so Howard and I went searching for fruit on a Saturday night. We found most stores closed. Howard lived in that town and knew it well. After a while, he said: “I know where we can find fresh fruit – at a product market on the other side of town.” As we traveled toward that market, Howard said: “Phil, I dread taking you to this place because the man who owns and operates it curses about every other breath.” We went on and when we entered the market the owner greeted us kindly and offered his help if we needed any. Not a curse word was spoken! We gathered the fruit we wanted and took it to the counter to pay. The owner had a lot of “small talk” with Howard but not a curse word was spoken. We paid, gathered up our fruit, and turned to leave when it all happened. The man said: “Brown, ain’t that a preacher you got with you tonight?” As we left that market, I thought: “It does not make one bit of difference in this world if that man knows that Phil Morrow is a preacher. But it makes all the difference in the world if that man knows that Phil Morrow is a Christian!”

2. The early disciples were called “Christians” because they lived like Christ lived. This involves many qualities of life. For example:

They loved like Christ loved. In John 13:34-35, Jesus had told them “A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another; as I have also loved you, that you love one another. By this shall all men know that you have love one to another.” It could be said of those early disciples: “Look how much they love one another.”

They lived every day like Christ lived regardless of life’s circumstances. A clear illustration of this truth is found in Acts chapter 4. This is the record of the work of Peter and John. They healed a lame man and were arrested and brought to trial. “By what power or by what name do you do your work?” they were asked. Their answer: “In the name of and for the sake of Jesus Christ.” And in Acts 4:13 we read: “Now when the rulers saw the BOLDNESS of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them that PETER AND JOHN HAD BEEN WITH JESUS.” The point is that their personal relationship with Jesus Christ was showing in their lives. Those doubting rulers knew that Peter and John were Christ’s men!

Many of us today claim the name of Christ. We call ourselves “Christians.” Other people call us “Christians.” I wonder: Do we deserve our name?

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