

Uses of "Christian" – Sorting out the Muddle!

1). The right and wrong usage of the term '**Christian**' needs urgently to be put into focus. Widespread misuse means that countless folk who have no time for Christ whatever, assume that they will inherit *eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* [Romans 6:23]. Their basis for thinking this is confusion over the two meanings of the word 'Christian'.

2) In English, words closely linked to names, keep the capital letter, e.g. *Shakespearean; Buddist; Marxist*. Where the link is pretty vague, like that of my milk to Louis Pasteur, the capital letter is dropped – it is merely *pasteurised*.

3). So it should be with the **two meanings of the word 'Christian'**.

-When it refers to **someone or something related closely to Christ**, it should be written '**Christian**'.

- But when it is a vague term referring to being decent & good-neighbourly it should be written 'christian' – or better still, not used at all.

4) It is this second meaning (which is a description of *behaviour* not of *belief*) that makes those who do *not* follow Christ resent being called 'non-Christians'. They assume that 'Christian' is a description of good behaviour, and that 'non-Christian' therefore is denial of their decency! (But is it no different to saying that they are non-Buddist, or a non-Jehovah's Witnesses, or non-Marxist.)

5) This double-use of the word 'Christians' is an enormous barrier to the Church's witness. The first steps to reduce this terrible mess and muddle, is for Christians to do the following:

i) Always use the word **Christian** with a capital C for things that **relate directly to Jesus Christ**. (Christian authors and editors please note!)

ii) For good behaviour that does not relate directly to Jesus Christ avoid the word 'christian' (with a small 'c') and make full use of 'decent', 'respectable', 'kindly', 'good neighbourly', 'helpful', etc.

6) Illustration: When I was small my Jewish doctor saved my life. It would muddle and muddy, confuse and confound absolutely *everything* were I now to thank him for being so **Christian**!!

7) **The term 'non-Christian' is a factual term of religious status, it is not a *moral* term.** To say that someone is non-Christian means simply that they do not acknowledge Christ as Lord and or seek to live in obedience to him, i.e. to 'follow' him in the Way. It is not an insult to be non-Christian!

8) We must not dilute terms, that is misleading and cruel. We must have the kindness and courage to be clear. The strength of our courage will be linked to the strength of our **care** for those for whom Christ died but who, as yet, know him not.