

Just Christians

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You can be just a Christian! Does that sound strange? With thousands of religious bodies in our country it might seem impossible to be a Christian without being part of a denomination. It is not only possible, but there are actually millions of “Christians only” around the world.

The Churches of Christ

Who are these people who seek to be only Christians? The congregations that they are a part of are usually known as “churches of Christ.” This term is not used in a denominational sense, but it is intended to show their desire to belong to Christ’s church. The Bible says, “*All the churches of Christ greet you*” (Romans 16.16). However, it is just as correct to describe the church that we read about in the Bible as “*the church of God*” (1 Corinthians 1.2), “*the body of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 12.27), or “*the household of faith*” (Galatians 6.10). These and similar Biblical phrases are not proper names, but are descriptive expressions which show how the church is related to Christ and his father.

Individually Christ’s followers are known as “Christians” in the Bible. *The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch* (Acts 11.26). *But if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name* (1 Peter 4.16). There is never a human name that is added to these names given from God. Paul was one of the greatest of all Christians, but he did not want disciples to call themselves “Paulites” or “Paulite Christians,” and the Lord’s church is never called the “St. Paul Church (1 Corinthians 1.10-17).

A Distinctive Plea

Churches of Christ have a distinctive plea. Of course, in many ways we agree with others who are striving to follow Christ. We firmly believe both in the inspiration of the entire Bible and in its sufficiency to guide us in all matters of faith. We also believe in the death of Jesus Christ and his atonement for our sins. We believe that after death all people will be rewarded or punished in another life for the way they have lived here. And as with all people of religious conviction we insist that the moral principles of Jesus are absolute truths to be demonstrated in the lives of his followers.

The Bible Only

However, we not only believe that the Scriptures are inspired, but also are convicted that the New Testament must be our only guide in religious matters. God’s word frequently warns us against changing the divine message. We read these words from the apostle Paul:

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1.8-9).

We, therefore, have no creed or catechism, but accept Christ as our only creed and the Bible as our only guidebook. In this way we are never led astray by a man-made creed, since we accept only the truth which may be learned from God’s word.

Restoration Rather Than Reformation

It is obvious that the religious world is badly divided. Great leaders such as Martin Luther and John Calvin tried to correct mistaken teachings and practices. But the reformers often started at different points and thus arrived at different conclusions. The result was division rather than unity.

Churches of Christ, on the other hand, plead for the restoration of New Testament Christianity rather than the reformation of existing religious bodies. Since all can agree that the early church was right, we should also be able to agree that we cannot be wrong if we reproduced that church today in every essential part. While many things have changed in the Twenty-First Century, the teaching of Jesus and his apostles has not. Truth is absolute and unchangeable. God's word is truth (John 17.17), and it can save today as surely as it did in the First Century. *You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free* (John 8.32).

If you visit one of the churches of Christ, you will find it worshipping God just as the early disciples did, *in spirit and truth* (John 4.24). You will observe that we partake of the Lord's supper, or communion, on the first day of every week. This is because we are following the example of the early Christians who assembled every Sunday to *break bread* (Acts 20.7). Likewise, in every other way churches of Christ seek to reproduce New Testament Christianity – in organization, in work, and in other areas of teaching.

How To Be Just a Christian

In the religious world today there is total disagreement in answering the Bible question, *What must I do to be saved?* (Acts 16.30). Here again churches of Christ reply by going to the scriptures for their answer. The Bible teaches that Christ shed His blood for our sins (Matthew 26.28) and that without it we cannot be saved (Hebrews 9.22). But what does Jesus require of us if we are to be saved by his sacrifice? Those who

crucified him were told, *Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified* (Acts 2.36). When these people on the day of Pentecost asked how they could be forgiven for crucifying the Son of God, the apostle Peter told them, *Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins* (Acts 2.38). Today we teach just as the apostles did that for Christ's blood to remove our sins, we must believe in him and repent of our sins and be baptized. As we are thus saved from our sins, the Lord adds us to his body, the church. *And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved* (Acts 2.47). *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body* (1 Corinthians 12.13). The saved, then, are in the body or church of Christ; a person cannot be saved outside of this body.

The early disciples were Christians only. Although we live 2000 years later, we too can be Christians only if we will follow the same teaching given to these first followers of Jesus. Christ said, *The seed is the word of God* (Luke 8.11). Just as surely as a planted acorn will produce only an oak, so God's word will produce Christians and nothing more. We invite your earnest consideration of this plea.

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