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*Just A Christian*

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Seeing that we live in a hyper-divided religious world, it is hard for some to imagine being “just a Christian.” Approximately 600 years ago the religious world splintered into a wide variety of named groups. Typically, we refer to these groups as “Protestant Denominations.” There were those who were protesting the abuses and false teachings of Roman Catholicism and, as such, they are called Protestants. Now, several centuries later, there still exists a multitude of denominational bodies who all claim allegiance to Jesus. Do you realize that the word “*Christian*” is found only three times in the Biblical text? Here they are...

**Acts 11:26** reads, “*And when he found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*”

**Acts 26:28** reads, “*Then Agrippa said unto Paul. Almost persuadest thou me to be a Christian.*”

**1 Peter 4:16** reads, “*Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*”

That’s it! The word for *disciple* in Acts 11:26 means pupil or student. So, a Christian is a student of God. The term *Christian* describes that the person who claims such is a follower of Jesus Christ. Now, there are many who claim to be followers of Jesus, but who call themselves by different religious names or titles. That practice was completely unknown to the Christians of the first century.

Think about the above facts in the face of our highly divided religious world. There are a multitude of churches who teach and practice different things. We find churches around us that are dedicated to “Reformed Theology.” In other words, their teaching and practice originates from the Reformation movement of the 16th century. There is another movement in religion that is known as the “community church” movement. I have personal experience with this. While preaching in middle Tennessee, a group of individuals moved into our area and began taking religious surveys among the community. Based on the results of the survey, they would build a church (*not a building*) based on the results.

Would God have man structure a religious movement based on the results of a community-wide survey? Is God pleased with the fact that there are so many varying teachings and practices in His name? What does His word say about division?

**Sometimes division is necessary.** Paul wrote, “*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them*” (Rom. 16:17). To avoid someone implies division. A student of God’s word can know the difference between truth and error (1 Jn. 4:1-6). Division is sometimes necessary because there are those who, in the name of God, teach things which are not in line with God’s word. There are religiously minded people who are heretics (Titus 3:10). A heretic is a divisive person and the Bible says to reject such a person. That is division!

**Jesus said that He came to bring division.**

Read this - Matthew 10:34-39. His message brings division, even among families, because some accept His teachings and some reject them. Division is the result.

**It is not God’s will that division exists.** Jesus prayed that his followers “*may be one*” (Jn. 17:21). Now, ask yourself a question and answer it honestly: Could the religious world, in it’s current condition, accurately be described as one? We have churches and religious movements all around us that teach different doctrines, have different worship styles, and that are called by different names. Can we really say that all of those who claim to follow Jesus today are truly “one?” Of course not! Only a dishonest person would say otherwise.

The question then becomes, “*How do we get to the end result of what Jesus prayed for?*” The answer is rather simple - we have to go to the Bible and follow what has been revealed therein. We won’t have to look for reformers and what they taught. We won’t have to look for a church that worships in a way that satisfies our desires. Jesus tells us that we all will be judged by His words on the final day (Jn. 12:48). You can be *just a Christian*. You don’t have to look for a hyphenated Christianity. In other words, you don’t have to be a \_\_\_\_\_-Christian. God’s people are to be “*of the same mind and the same judgment*” (1 Cor. 1:10). Please, listen! You can be just a Christian without any addition or subtraction!

“*God’s people are to be of the same mind and of the same judgment.*”

A visitor to this Web site recently wrote our offices inquiring about the name that the universal Church should wear. In a day when millions of church-goers are naming themselves after everything from angels to men to religious offices and activities (with many churches apparently feeling like the more bizarre they are, the better), this gentleman's e-mail was refreshing to read. It was evident that he and those of the church where he worshipped had a desire to be called, not the latest trendy name or whatever denominational name their great-great-great...grandparents wore, but whatever **God** wants them to be called. What does God want the Church to be known as? If a congregation of the Church is going to put a sign outside of their meeting place, or put their contact information in phone books and on the Internet, or have an official name on the books at the court house, what name should the Church wear?

There is only one place to turn to find out what followers of Jesus Christ should be called: God's Word (see Butt, 2007). God created man, saved man, and has every right to tell man what to do and how to do it. The teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles and prophets in God's revealed Word is man's ultimate authority and the book by which the world will be judged (Matt. 28:18; John 12:48; Col. 3:17). If the saved want to please God in every area of their lives, including the religious name they wear, God's Word must be consulted.

It is helpful, first of all, to understand something about the word "church." The Greek word *ekklesia*, translated "church" in most English Bibles, was generally understood in the first-century Roman-ruled world simply to mean "assembly" - a gathering of people, whether for a secular or a religious purpose (Danker, et al., 2000, pp. 303-304; Thayer, 1962, pp. 195-196). Three times in Acts 19, Luke used the term *ekklesia* to describe a disorderly, secular assembly at Ephesus (vs. 32, 39, 41). The Septuagint translators used the term *ekklesia* more than 200 years before Christ in their Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe a group of 400,000 Israelite soldiers (Jud. 20:2). In short, the word *ekklesia* was used before and after the time of Christ in reference to any kind of assembly. In the New Testament, however, it most often refers to obedient followers of Jesus Christ - those who have been called "**out** (Greek *ek*) of darkness **into** His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9, emp. added).

Several times in the New Testament, the term

"church" is linked together with the Greek term *theos* (God), and thus one easily can ascertain the fact that the Church to which obedient believers belong is the Church begun and owned by God. Paul wrote "**to the church of God** which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1, emp. added), and later commanded the Corinthians to "[g]ive no offense...**to the church of God**" (1 Cor. 10:32-33, emp. added). He confessed to the churches of Galatia that he had "**persecuted the church of God**" before becoming a Christian (Gal. 1:13, emp. added). Paul also wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica, reminding them how they "**became imitators of the churches of God** which are in Judea" (1 Thes. 2:14, emp. added), and even boasted of them "**among the churches of God**" for their endurance through persecution (2 Thes. 1:3-4, emp. added). One must not miss the point that the Church of the New Testament is God's Church. It is of **divine** origin and established according to **Deity's** "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11). Certainly then, the name "church of God" is a biblical name to wear. "Children of God" (Jn. 1:12; Rom. 8:16; 1 Jn. 3:1-2) are members of the "church of God."

The Bible writers also referred to the "church of God" as the body or **Church of Christ**. Why would God's Church be called Christ's Church? Consider the following:

- Jesus is Deity (Jn. 1:1,3,23; 10:30,33; 20:28; cf. Isa. 9:6).
- Jesus said the Church was "His" (Matt. 16:18).
- Jesus paid for the Church with His own blood (Acts 20:28).
- Jesus saved the Church from eternal destruction (Jn. 3:16; Acts 4:12; Eph. 5:23).
- Jesus is "the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18, 24; Eph. 5:22-23).
- Jesus is the bridegroom and the Church is His bride (Eph. 5:22-32; Rev. 21:9; cf. Matt. 25:1-13).
- Jesus is returning to take His faithful Church to a new home (Jn. 14:1-3; Matt. 25:1-13; 1 Cor. 15:24; 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

Sincere, open-minded, obedient followers of Jesus Christ (i.e., Christians—Acts 11:26) who read the New Testament wondering what they should call the Church of which they are members, will come to the following conclusion: Though God did not assign one particular title for the Church, there are biblical designations that Christians can wear "by faith" (Rom. 10:17), namely "Church of God" and "Church of

## What Should We Call the Church?

Christ.” [NOTE: This is not to say that everyone who wears one of these names is a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. Sadly, many who wear both of these names dishonor God with unscriptural acts of worship, a variety of false teachings, lukewarm lives, etc.) A faithful follower of Jesus Christ must be committed to assembling with Christians who not only wear a scriptural, non-divisive name, but also who practice authorized, unadulterated, New Testament Christianity (see [Miller, 2007](#).)]

Nowhere in the New Testament was the Church called Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Catholic, Guardian Angels’, etc. In fact, the Christians in Corinth were specifically warned about wearing divisive names that bring honor to men and imply that the Church is divided (1 Cor. 1:10-17; cf. Jn. 17:20-21). Sadly, millions of “Christians” around the world continue to call themselves by names other than those God has authorized in Scripture.

In addition to Scripture’s numerous examples of the Church being called God’s or Christ’s, common sense demands such biblical designations. Consider two examples.

- If Christ owns the Church, should the Church not wear His name? If a man (we’ll call him Ricky) worked 20 years, saved his money, and bought a house, whose house is it? It is Ricky’s house. If anyone ever put a sign in front of Ricky’s house that said the house was any person’s other than Ricky’s, he would be doing that which is unauthorized and displeasing to Ricky. Only he who owns the house has the right to name it. The Church is “the house **of God**” (1 Tim. 3:15, emp. added), no one else’s. Christians should call His “house” by no other name.
- If my wife informed me today that she wanted to wear another man’s name, I would be terribly hurt and “jealous with godly jealousy” (2 Cor. 11:2-4). Perhaps it wasn’t another man’s name, but simply a name that correlates with something she likes. Say, for example, instead of Jana Lyons, she wanted to be called Jana Homeschooler. Would that bother me? It most certainly would. I love homeschooling, but I am seriously opposed to my

wife calling herself by any other name than Lyons. Similarly, if the Church is the bride of Christ, why would any church claiming to be in love with Jesus and married to Him spiritually ever call themselves by another name? God is a jealous God (Ex. 20:5) and nothing in Scripture authorizes His Church to call herself anything other than after Him.

When the Jewish Sanhedrin brought Peter and John before them not many days after the Church had been established (Acts 4) and inquired “by what name” they had been teaching, Peter exclaimed:

[B]y **the name of Jesus Christ** of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. **Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved** (Acts 4:8,10-12, emp. added).

The Bible may not give one official title for the Church, but both reason and revelation demand that Christians put off party names and simply call themselves after the One Who saved them. When Jesus comes back to receive His bride and take her home, she better be wearing **His** name and no one else’s.

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### Unique features of the Church of Christ

- We use the Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3). We have no creed book, convention, or central headquarters.
- Our name is after the One who died to establish His church (Rom. 16:16).
- The church of Christ began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4).
- Jesus promised to establish His church (Matt. 16:18).
- That church was purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28).
- The church is married to Christ (Rom. 7:4).
- It was established in the first century (Acts 2:41, 47).
- Jesus is the one and only Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23).
- You can only be added to the church by God Himself (Acts 2:41, 47).

### What about being saved?

- All people are saved by grace, though faith (Eph. 2:8-9).
- No one is saved by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26).
- No one is saved by grace alone (Matt. 7:21).
- Jesus said that belief plus baptism will produce salvation (Mk. 16:16). That is a promise, not a command.
- The Bible teaches that repentance plus baptism produces remission of sins (Acts 2:37-38).
- Belief, confession, and baptism is seen in the account of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37-38).
- The Corinthians heard, believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8).
- Christ is "put on" in baptism (Gal. 3:26-27).
- The apostle Peter said that "baptism does save us" (1 Pet. 3:21).

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