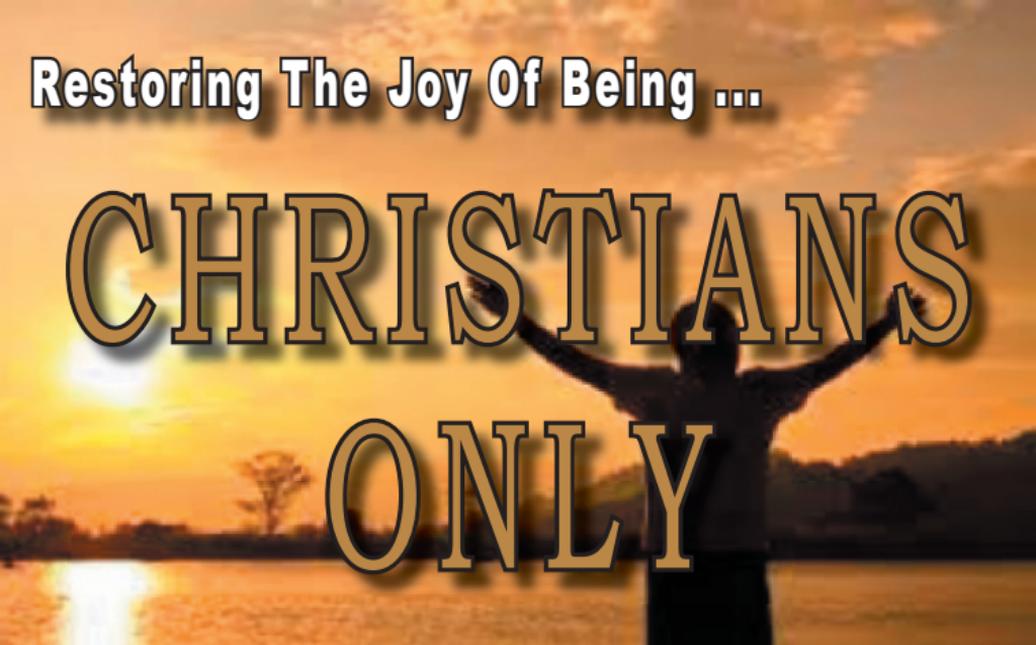


Restoring The Joy Of Being ...

CHRISTIANS ONLY



Over two thousand years ago the disciples of Jesus were called Christians.¹ Many people of faith today have always wondered what it meant to be just a Christian in the first century in the midst of so many confused idolatrous beliefs? Today, there are likewise thousands of religious groups throughout the world that are quite confusing.

Add to this the fact that the religious groups that exist today are as diverse as those that were scattered throughout the world in the first century. Nevertheless, in the midst of so many idolatrous beliefs and religious groups in the first century, thousands of people responded to the gospel in order to be united as one body of faith, being Christians only. We can do the same today.

Many people in the first century were becoming Christians simply because of the overwhelming truth that Jesus of Nazareth was more than a prophet. He was the actual incarnation of God just as He claimed to be. And in order to come out of the religious confusion that existed in those days, and be set free from the bondage of sin and religion, millions of people then and today are rethinking what it means to be just a Christian.

One can be just a Christian regardless of where he or she sits on Sunday morning.

The Thirst To Be Christians Only

People of faith today are hungering and thirsting to maintain a simple faith as opposed to being marooned in the confusion of numerous systems of religion that are divided from one another by unique divisive names and traditional religious ceremonies. Therefore, there are thousands of people throughout the world today who want to restore Christianity to its original simplicity as it was in the first century.

For this reason we too want to be Christians only. That's all. In a world of conflicting and confusing religious beliefs and practices, everyone can be just a Christian, that is, if he or she is willing to focus on the word of God as the only authority in all matters of faith. Because people want to free themselves today from the bondage of religion, they are turning to the only guide that will lead them out of the diversity that is caused by so many religious groups that exist today.

People have simply concluded that they can be a disciple of Christ without being in the bondage of some religious institution. It is a phenomenon of these times that people of faith throughout the world are thirsting to be set free from the bondage of religious traditions and misguided religiosity. They are thirsting to fellowship and encourage one another on this road to restoration. It is our plea that all of us join together in order to restore this simple New Testament Christianity that is based solely on the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through obedience of the gospel, anyone can be just a Christian without placing their membership with a particular religious organization that seeks their loyalty as a club member. For this reason we believe it is time to restore Jesus as the sole owner of all those who believe in Him and have obeyed

the good news of His death for our sins. Contrary to some religious organization claiming us to be their member, we seek to place our membership in heaven alone, right at the feet of the reigning King Jesus.

The word “Christian” means that one is “of Christ.” That is, as a Christian we belong to Christ alone. We are followers of the person of Jesus and His teachings because we have responded to the good news that He brought into the world. One who follows the person of Jesus Christ, and is obedient to the gospel, is just a Christian. Nothing more, nothing less. Are you interested? If so, then this plea is your invitation to join with us and millions around the world who have discovered the freedom that one can enjoy by being just a Christian.

When one determines to base his or her faith on the word of God alone, then one can be a Christian only, regardless of all the religious traditions or divided religious sects among which we live today.

Branded By Christ Alone

Every Christian throughout the world seeks to be identified by the name of Christ. Being a Christian means just that. There is no such thing in the New Testament that Christians are to be branded by a unique denominational religious group. In the first century, believers in Jesus were simply known as Christians. They were not identified with a unique name that would separate them from one another. They were not divided into different denominations simply because religious denominations that posed to be a unique flavor of Christianity, did not exist in the first century. Therefore, in order to be a Christian today, one must put away any unique name that would separate him or her from others who have likewise obeyed the gospel in baptism and are seeking to be Christians only.

When one determines to wear the name of Christ alone, regardless of his or her religious heritage, then he or she can be just a Christian.

Why Be Only A Christian

We are Christians because Jesus fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies that were written about Him hundreds of years before He came into this world. Therefore, He must be believed. Even before the world was created, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit planned that the Son of God would be incarnate in the flesh of man. When the time was right in the history of mankind, the Son of God was incarnate in the flesh of man. The following is a list of only a few of the fulfilled prophecies concerning the Son of God coming into this world:

- A. He would be, and was a descendant of Abraham (Gn 12:1-3; Gl 3:16).
- B. He would be, and was born in Bethlehem (Mc 5:2; Mt 2:1,3).
- C. He would be, and was a sojourner in Egypt (Hs 11:1; Mt 2:15).
- D. He would be, and was a teacher of Gentiles (Is 42:1-4; Mt 12:18-21).
- E. He would work, and did work miracles (Is 35:5,6; Lk 7:18-23).
- F. He would be, and was betrayed (Zc 13:7; Mt 26:55,56).
- G. He would die, but be raised from the dead (Ps 16:10; Jn 2:19-22).

Being just a Christian guards one from binding on others religious traditions or rites and rituals that divide Christians from one another.

Unity Of Christians

God expects His people to be united throughout the world. Though there were city assemblies of Christians in the first century as in Corinth² and Ephesus,³ all local city assemblies were part of the one universal church.⁴ No local assembly of Christians validated themselves as Christians by proclaiming autonomy from other Christians that were meeting at other locations in the same city, or in another city, town or village. On the contrary, all individual Christians were members of the one body of Christ that existed throughout the world. Therefore, there is only one church of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this church that is made up of all those who have responded to the gospel, and thus are just Christians as a result of their obedient response.

God expects Christians to be united together as one universal church.⁵ They are not to divide themselves by binding as law any religious heritage, religious tradition, or any matters of opinion. As obedient disciples of Jesus who have given themselves in service to God, all Christians are to stand fast in the faith and strive together with one heart and soul in order to maintain unity.⁶ Through the power of gospel, and their unity, Christians are, as a united body, a mighty worldwide force against evil. Everyone who struggles with this world should be encouraged to become a part of this worldwide force in order to make this a better world. But in order to be encouraged, we must strive to restore the one united body of Christ wherein we can find close fellowships.

Since all Christians throughout the world are the one church of Christ, then groups of Christians in any area do not have the right to declare their autonomy or independence from one another.

Jesus Prayed For Unity

Jesus prayed that those who follow Him should be united as one.⁷ He did not pray that we would be satisfied by dividing ourselves into different denominations according to our unique heritages, or different religious rituals or Sunday ceremonies. On the contrary, He prayed that all His disciples throughout the world who believe in Him, and who have obeyed the gospel, should work together to answer His prayer that we all seek to maintain the unity of the faith. It is for this reason that we are striving to be united in order to call all people of the world into a covenant relationship with God through obedience to the gospel.⁸ We must not forget, therefore, that inherent in the one gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is the unity of believers for which Jesus prayed.

The fact that Jesus prayed for unity among His disciples is proof that unity among all Christians can be realized if His desire for unity is impressed on our hearts.

Being Free To Be Only A Christian

Being just a Christian sets us free. We are set free from the bondage of religious restrictions that others might impose on us as law, which restrictions have no authority in the word of God. This means that believers in Jesus can be just Christians without being a part of any man-made religious group. In this way all believers in Jesus can be free from being divided into different religious groups that are denominated from one another, either by unique names or religious traditions.

One can be free to be a Christian only by allowing the Bible to be his or her sole authority in matters faith. Since we will be judged only by the word of Jesus,⁹ then we are free in matters of faith to be accountable only to the word of Jesus. When people of faith establish the word of God as their only authority in matters of faith, then unity among believers will prevail.

Since the Bible is the Spirit-inspired word of God,¹⁰ then we are free to allow the Bible alone to direct us in godly living. Since this word is our source of faith,¹¹ then we are free to allow it to be the only foundation of our faith.

It is certainly not wrong to carry on with religious traditions. However, religious traditions must never be bound on believers in a manner by which the traditions cause division among Christians.¹² In order that the truth of the gospel set us truly free, we must agree to allow the Bible to be our final authority in matters of faith, not our former religious traditions or unique names.¹³

We must speak, therefore, where the Bible speaks. But where the Bible says nothing about a certain religious practice, we must allow freedom of opinion in the atmosphere of loving discussion. When one is a Christian only, therefore, he or she

is very cautious about imposing on others religious traditions or any current rituals or ceremonies that are not found in the Bible.

We are truly not set free in Christ if we continue in the bondage of divisive religious heritages and unique ritualistic ceremonies that divide us from one another.

First Principles To Being Christians Only

Being just a Christian in the community means believing and doing good to all people. Being a Christian means being a disciple who works in thanksgiving for what Jesus has done for us through the gospel. In order for anyone to get started in living as a Christian only, the following are fundamental beliefs that all Christians must maintain in their lives:

- A. Believe in the one true and living God (Is 44:8; Ep 4:4-6).
- B. Believe in Jesus as the one Lord (Jn 20:30,31; Ep 4:4-6).
- C. Believe in the one universal body, the church (Cl 1:18).
- D. Believe in the one Holy Spirit and His fruit (Gl 5:22,23).
- E. Believe in the one baptism (immersion) (At 2:38; Ep 4:4-6).
- F. Believe in the one faith (Ep 4:4-6; Jd 3).
- G. Believe in holy and moral living (Cl 3:12-17; 1 Pt 1:15).
- H. Believe in Jesus' principle of love (Jn 13:34,35; 14:15).
- I. Believe in the one gospel (Rm 1:13-16; 1 Co 15:1-4).

Being united as Christians only means that we must all start our Christians journey with Jesus on the same foundation.

Expectations Of Christians

As a result of their commitment to Jesus, Christians expect to live the abundant life of spiritual and emotional peace in this world.¹⁴ Christians know and expect all things to work together for good.¹⁵ They expect not to be tempted above what they are able to endure.¹⁶ However, because of their commitment to be working disciples for their Lord Jesus, they expect persecution from those whom Satan is using to destroy the work of God.¹⁷ Therefore, they have peace of mind in the fact that the word of God tells them not to be ashamed of their stand for the gospel

of Jesus, but to glorify God by living as a Christian.¹⁸ Since the disciples of Jesus are more than Christians in name only, they understand that obedient service in response to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will stir up persecution against them. But they also remember that the reward for faithful discipleship is eternal life in heaven.

In being Christians only, then we must expect that those who are bound to either man-made doctrines, or man-originated religious heritages, will persecute those who would stand for being Christians only.

Anyone Can be Just A Christian

In order to be a disciple of Jesus, one must first believe that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the Son of God.¹⁹ One must then respond to the gospel of this incarnate God by being immersed into Jesus Christ in order to put on Christ.²⁰ Jesus is calling upon everyone in the world through the good news of His death for your sins, resurrection for our hope, and security by the present kingdom reign of King Jesus over all things.²¹ If one responds to Jesus' call, then he or she can be just a Christian. Great things will then happen in one's life.²² It is for this reason that we encourage everyone to respond to the good news of all those events that Jesus accomplished when He came into this world in order to deliver us out of this world. We must never forget the following words of the Holy Spirit that were written in 2 Corinthians 4:15 by the hand of the apostle Paul:

For all things are for you sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

References: 1. Acts 11:26, 2. 1 Corinthians 1:2, 3. Acts 20:17, 4. Romans 16:16, 5. 1 Corinthians 1:10, 6. Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:2-16, 7. John 17:20,21, 8. Romans 6:3-6, 9. John 12:48, 10. 2 Timothy 3:16,17, 11. Romans 10:17, 12. Galatians 5:1; see Mark 7:1-9; 13.

John 8:32; **14.** John 10:10; Philippians 4:6,7, **15.** Romans 8:28, **16.** 1 Corinthians 10:13, **17.** 2 Timothy 3:12, **18.** 1 Peter 4:16, see Acts 11:26; Matthew 5:10, **19.** John 20:30,31, **20.** Galatians 3:26,27, **21.** 2 Thessalonians 2:14; see Ephesians 1:15-23, **22.** Acts 2:38,47

Group Review Discussion Questions

[After reading the text of this bookito, answer the following questions in a discussion group with others.]

1. Why did those in the first century who responded to the gospel not become members of a denomination?
2. Why does being a Christian only infer that one cannot bind religious traditions on those who also want to be Christians only?
3. Why does becoming a Christian only infer that one does not place membership with an autonomous religious group in order to validate himself or herself as a Christian?
4. When one becomes a Christian, what does it mean not to be branded by a divisive name?
5. Why do Old Testament prophecies of Jesus prove that He was the Son of God?
6. Why does one become a member of the one universal church when he or she obeys the gospel?
7. What was the unity for which Jesus prayed in reference to all His disciples?
8. Why does being a Christian only set one free from the bondage of religion?
9. What does it mean to have the word of God as the only authority in matters of faith?
10. When people of faith obey the gospel, why are they often divided into different religious groups?

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