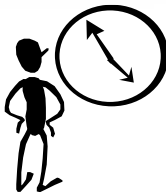


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.

(every other week)

Wednesday:

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
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Can We Just Be Christians

By Craig Thomas

In a world filled with religious traditions and denominational churches, the concept of being simply Just a Christian is difficult to communicate. Yet a careful reader of the New Testament will realize Jesus did not die so His followers could be divided into sects and parties (John 17:20-23). Jesus died to reconcile all men in one body to God (Ephesians 2:16). To belong only to Christ, to have been baptized into the one body of which Jesus Christ is the Savior, is something altogether different from belonging to any one of the over 30,000 or more religious bodies in this country (I Corinthians 12:13; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:23).

The Bible teaches there is only “one body” and “one faith,” just as there is only “one God, one Lord, one baptism, and one hope” (Ephesians 4:4-6). This “one body” is Christ’s church (Ephesians 1:22-23) which Jesus built (Matthew 16:18), not men (Hebrews 8:1-2). This spiritual house is made up of Christians who are “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5), citizens of God’s kingdom (Colossians 1:13), and saints of God (Colossians 1:2). They have been born again “of water and the Spirit” into God’s family (John 3:5; Ephesians 2:19). The church of Christ is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20), not on the sand of denominational creeds and traditions. Jesus is the “chief cornerstone” (I Peter 2:6-7; I Corinthians 3:11) and the only head (Ephesians 1:22) and “all authority” in heaven and on earth rests in Him (Matthew 28:18). This leaves no room for Popes, Presidents, councils, synods, conventions or so-called “latter-day prophets.”

Jesus built the church according to God’s divine pattern. A house built by any other (e.g., Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Joseph Smith, Ellen White, Mary Baker

Eddy, the Popes of Rome, the Watchtower Society, etc.) is not recognized by God. “Except Jehovah build the house, they labor in vain that build it” (Psalms 127:1; Matthew 15:13). Jesus condemned the various sects and parties of His day (Mark 7:6-9, 13) causing great offense to those sectarians (Matthew 15:12). Does the appeal to be simply Just a Christian interest or offend you?

Simply Christians

When people on the first Pentecost after Jesus’ death complied with the conditions of grace for their salvation (Acts 2:38-41; cf. Romans 5:1-2) “...*the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:47). To which church did God add them? Were they Lutherans? Mormons? Roman Catholics? Was Peter a member of one denomination and John another? When Paul was baptized (Acts 22:16) did he become an Episcopalian, Methodist, or Catholic? Do these questions seem absurd to you? Certainly, because no one would claim that those baptized in Acts 2, or Peter, or John, or Paul were anything other than simply Christians! If they were alive today, no denomination could claim them for the apostles’ teaching made people just Christians, not Protestants or Catholics.

The “Seed” Principle

In Matthew 15:13 Jesus makes this statement: “*Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.*” How do you get plants? Everyone knows the first step in the process is to sow seed. Furthermore, everyone knows if you plant corn seeds you get corn plants, if you plant tomato seeds, you get tomato plants. The Bible says seed also produces Christians. What type of seed? “*The seed is the Word of God*” (Luke 8:4-15; I Peter 1:23) . In I Corinthians 3:5-7 Paul tells us it was his duty as a minister of God to go about sowing this seed, the Word of God. (also see I Corinthians 2:6-13) Now I ask you, fair reader, “What did the seed Paul planted produce?” Methodists? Presbyterians? Baptists? Catholics?

No, it produced just Christians, because he simply planted the Word of God. Remember, seed always produces after its kind. Recall, to get corn one must plant corn, to get tomatoes one must plant tomatoes. Thus, to get Methodists one must plant the Methodist Discipline, to get Baptists one must plant the Baptist Manual, to get Catholics one must plant The Catechism of the Catholic Church. Why can we understand this inviolable principle in tending our farms and gardens, but can’t when it comes to the plain teaching of God’s word?

Do You Realize What This Means?

It simply means that all the creeds, traditions, “revelations,” and institutions of men that have cropped up over the past 1900 years to clutter the religious scene and confuse our minds are at best unnecessary; unnecessary to life and godliness, and unnecessary to the hope of heaven. But it also means the whole concept of modern denom-

inationalism is not part of the true Christianity originating in the mind of God, revealed by the Holy Spirit, and preserved in the New Testament. God purposed the church of Jesus Christ before He made the world (Ephesians 1:3-4; 3:10-11). Did He purpose the Lutheran Church or the Episcopal Church from eternity? Did anyone ever become a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon simply by obeying the scriptures only? Did the Holy Spirit, who guided the apostles in the first century into "*all truth*" (John 16:13), reveal to them the doctrines, teachings, and names that make the Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Catholics distinctly different denominations?

Can We Be Simply Christians?

Certainly! No one ever became anything else by following the Bible and Jesus. Follow the Word of God as it stands, not after it has been filtered through the human-written creeds and doctrines of men. Let God's Word make of you what it will. It will make of you what it made those in the book of Acts. Those who continued in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42) were believers, disciples, saints, and Christians; it made a group of them the church of God or the church of Christ, and that is all the apostles' doctrine will ever make of anyone.

Our Claim and Our Aim

We do not claim to have special knowledge of God's Word others cannot obtain. Paul instructed that man can understand God's Word (Ephesians 3:1-5). All men can understand God's Word if they will simply read it with an open mind (Acts 17:10-12) and recognize Jesus and His Word are the source of all truth (John 14:6; 16:13; 17:17). The only worship of God that followers of denominational doctrines, traditions, and teachings can offer is vain (empty/useless) worship (Matthew 15:9). Regardless of how good it may seem, it is sheer folly to listen to and follow these doctrines, traditions, and teachings. For these reasons: our love for God and men, the shortness of life, and the certainty of judgment; we will use great plainness of speech. We speak this way, not with the purpose of offending, but to challenge you to "*examine yourself to see if you are in the faith*" (II Corinthians 13:5).

Our claim and our aim are neither boastful nor arrogant. We are Just Christians, nothing more and nothing less. We are not associated with, and have no allegiance to, any denomination; because the concept of denominationalism is condemned in God's Word (I Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-4). Denominationalism is in opposition to the singular nature of the church Jesus built (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4; Colossians 1:18).

The church to which we belong has no earthly head and reports to no earthly headquarters. Its head is Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:20-23), and He resides at the right hand of God in heaven (Hebrews 1:3; Ephesians 1:20). Our aim and sole desire are to imitate those in the New Testament who were members of Christ's church (Acts 2:42, 47). To this end, we use God's Word as our only guide (I Peter 4:11; Colossians

3:17) for we believe, as Jesus Himself said, that “*He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*” (John 12:48).

Won't you join us in following the Bible alone and letting it make all of us just Christians?

Can a Good Man Be Saved Outside the Church?

By N. B. Hardeman

I regret that there is such a teaching abroad as this – for instance, that a man does not have to become a member of the church in order to be saved; that there are just as good people outside of the church as there are in it. Now, I do not believe either one of those statements, and I am sure there would be controversy on the part of someone just there. Your standard of goodness when thus speaking is different from the standard of goodness that I have in mind. A person may be a good man with reference to his first duty toward himself; he may be a good man with reference to his fellow men – his treatment and kindness toward them; but in God's eyes, no one is accounted as a good man who has not done his duty to God as well as to himself and others. When I talk about a good man from God's point of view, I mean a man that is not only good to himself, good to his neighbor, but is good to God Almighty, in that he has bowed in submission to His will; and when he so does, he thereby becomes a member of the church of the Bible and is saved by virtue of that relationship with the God of his being. Let us, therefore, be exceedingly thoughtful and careful and not make the impression upon our children and those around about that the church is a nonessential, unimportant, and worthless institution.

If one man can be saved on the outside as well as on the inside, then, of course, two men could also be saved; and if two men could also be saved independent of the church, of course, two thousand could; and if two thousand, why not two million; and if two million, why not the entire human family, and thus render the church absolutely useless? Why should Christ establish it, fill it with his Spirit and become the head of it, if the human family can be saved without it as well as with it? I am sure, ladies and gentlemen, that just such casual, thoughtless remarks as are frequently made are responsible at this hour for the unconcernedness and the indifference on the part of the great masses of the people of their failure to appreciate the value as they should this institution so prominent upon the pages of New Testament story...

Now, I do not say, and do not mean, that the church does the saving; but I do suggest and positively state that Christ Jesus our Lord, is the Savior, but that the place of salvation is in the church of God and in the family of high heaven; and outside of that family, God's church, or the fold, he has no children.

There are just two departments in life, two governments, to which I bow in obe-

dience and yield myself. Either I am a servant tonight of His Satanic Majesty, I am under the dominion of the devil himself, or I am a child of God and a member of His family. I do not occupy the middle ground. I am on one side or the other; and if I am saved, I am a Christian, if I can read my title clear to mansions over there, it is evidence prima facia that I am a member of the body of Christ, the church of God, the family of the firstborn. If, on the other hand, I stand tonight with sins unforgiven, and consigned to the regions of infernal abode, it is evident that I am a member of the devil's family.

So, then, every person ought to recognize just what the church of the Bible is and who compose it. In it are all the redeemed, all the saved, all those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The thing that I now want to emphasize is the fact of its unity and oneness. That very statement itself denies and opposes the idea of its being a denomination. I know it is as common as can be that whenever you talk with men and meet with people they speak about different denominations all over the city, all over this land and country of ours. But put it down friends, for further study and for earnest consideration, that when you are reading in the Bible about the church, never get it into your minds that you are reading about some denomination; for no man ever did or ever can read from the book of God a single, solitary statement or even a hint at anything that smacks of denominationalism. That thing is modern, recent, and unknown to the book of God as certain as in your midst I stand, and there lives not a man in the city of Nashville who can take God's book and turn to a single, solitary passage therein and find anything that even looks like a distant relation of modern denominationalism.

Responding to Other's Comments

By Doy Moyer

Among the works of the flesh are strife, outbursts of anger, dissensions, and divisions (Galatians 5:20). There seems to be a great deal of this in the world, and that should not surprise us. But there also seems to be much of this among those claiming to follow Christ. I'd like to say that this is a surprise, but it's not. Christians have long wrestled with being too influenced by the world and conforming to the attitudes and practices of the age (cf. Romans 12:1-2). Our lights are often dim because we partake of the darkness far more than we would like to admit.

We see this all over social media, which is, sadly, the most toxic of environments if we let ourselves get lost in its enticement. Disagreements quickly become divisive and anger-inducing, so the insults and derogatory insinuations begin. It's difficult, it seems, to find discussions that are filled with grace, giving the benefit of any doubt, or believing the best intentions in others.

I get it. I've been guilty. And I know it's hard to read something and get the full sense of what someone intends. We read what others say and hear it in our own voice,

emphasize it as we think, and may well miss the point of what was meant. Many times I've thought that people go out of their way to swerve around the point and miss it entirely. Whatever it takes, don't hit the point!

I'm being slightly facetious, but not by much. The irony does not escape me. We all make judgments about what others mean and how they mean it. We all have those "bad days" where we are in a bad place and easily snap at others because we take something the wrong way. It is in those times I have to remind myself that "this" is not the best time for me to say anything, for "*a fool's anger is known at once*" (Proverbs 12:16). It's hard to let an insult go and not respond in kind — or even respond at all (cf. Proverbs 26:4-5).

That "at once" part gets me. People might spend hours writing and rewriting, studying and working through an issue, carefully wording what they want to say only to be rebuffed in an instant by someone who got immediately triggered — someone who did not study and gave little thought before firing back. Social media platforms do not distinguish. In a moment we can make our thoughts known, for good or ill.

We need to remember that our words have the power to encourage or discourage. We can lift up or pull down. We can help or hurt. I know that not everything posted is great and sometimes we need someone who can provide a gentle rebuke. May I offer some suggestions when thinking about entering a conversation with potential disagreement?

1. Give the benefit of the doubt. Assume the best first. Assume that the other means well and intends to do something beneficial to others. Be gracious and kind upfront.
2. If you disagree, sometimes (maybe most of the time) it's okay to just move on. I don't need to comment on everything I disagree with. I'd be most miserable if I did that, and it's just not healthy mentally to spend all day online arguing and responding instantly to heated fuses.
3. If you feel the need to respond in strong disagreement (make sure this is really necessary), think about sending a private message first to ask about needed clarifications. I have been blessed by several who have done this with me, and this allowed me to make changes, clarify, and sometimes delete before it becomes a mess in the public arena.
4. Watch the words because words do mean something. Insults and evil surmising do not fit the child of God. We expect this from the world. It ought not to be so among us. We are family, not enemies.
5. The world is watching. They will see how we treat one another on social media. They will know whether what we profess is real and meaningful to us. They will see whether we love one another or bicker so much that we despise each other. (See John 13:34-35 and John 17:20-21 to see how important this is.)

The point? As Christians, let us not add to the toxicity of social media. Rather "*Bless and do not curse*" (Romans 12:14). By how we engage others, we can show the works of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit. This matters eternally.