

Just Christians

You can be just a Christian! Does this sound strange? With about 300 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' in this and other nations.

The Churches of Christ

Who are these people who seek to be 'only Christians'? The congregations of which they are part are usually known as 'churches of Christ'. This term is not used in a sectarian sense, but is intended to denote their desire to belong to Christ's church. The Bible says, "*All the churches of Christ send greetings*". (Romans 16:16). However, it is just as correct to describe the church of Christ 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 family of believers*' (Galatians 6:10). These and similar Biblical phrases are not proper names, but 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. This name was first given to Christ's disciples in Antioch (Acts 11:26). "*However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name*" (1 Peter 4:16). Never does a human name prefix this God given name. Paul was one of the greatest of all Christians, but he did not want disciples to be called 'Paulites' or 'Pauline Christians' (1 Corinthians 1:10–17).

A Distinctive Plea

Churches of Christ have a distinctive plea. Of course, in many ways we agree with others striving to follow Christ. We believe in the divine inspiration of the entire Bible, and that it is sufficient to guide us in all matters of faith: in the death of Jesus Christ and His atonement for our sins; and that after death all people will be rewarded or punished in another life for the way they have lived here. And with all people of real religious conviction, we insist that the moral principles of Jesus are absolute truths to be exemplified in the personal righteousness of the child of God.

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 faith. God's Word frequently warns us against changing the divine message (See Galatians 1:6–9). We, therefore, have no creed or catechism to present, but accept Christ as our only creed and the Bible as our only guidebook. In this way we are never prevented by an erroneous creed from accepting any truth

which may be learned from God's Word.

Restoration Rather Than Reformation

It is obvious to thinking people that the religious world is badly divided. Great leaders such as Martin Luther and John Calvin sought to correct erroneous teachings and practices. But the reformers often started at different points and thus arrived at different conclusions. Division rather than unity has resulted.

Churches of Christ, on the other hand, plead for the restoration of apostolic Christianity rather than a 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 succeed in reproducing that church today in every essential part. While many things have changed in the twenty-first century, the teachings of Jesus and His apostles have not. Truth is absolute and unchangeable. God's word is truth (John 17:17) and can save today as surely as in the first century if applied in the same way. *'The truth will set you free'*. (John 8:32).

Should you visit one of the churches of Christ you will find it worshipping God as did the early disciples – *'in spirit and in truth'* (John 4:24). You will observe that it partakes of the Lord's supper, or communion, every Sunday. This is because we are following the example of the early Christians who assembled every first day of the week to *'break bread'* (See Acts 20:7). Likewise, in every other way churches of Christ seek to reproduce New Testament Christianity in organisation, in work, and in other areas of teaching.

How To Be Just A Christian

In few places is there so much disagreement as 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 appropriate that sacrifice? Those who crucified Him were told to *'be assured'* or believe that Jesus is *'both Lord and Christ'* (Acts 2:36). When these people, on the day of Pentecost, then asked for further information they were told, *'Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven'* (Acts 2:38). Today we teach, as did the apostles then, that for Christ's blood to remove our sins we must, as believers in Him, repent and be baptised. As we are thus saved from our sins, the Lord adds us to His body, the church. *'And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved'* (Acts 2:47). *'For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body'* (1 Corinthians 12:13). The saved, then, are in the body, or church, of Christ; one cannot be saved and be outside this body.

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The early disciples were Christians only. Although we live almost 2000 years later, we too can be Christians only, if we will follow the same teachings 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 tree, so God's word will produce Christians – and nothing more. We invite your earnest consideration to this plea.