

**THE SOWER
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JUST CHRISTIANS

If you were asked what you are religiously, what would be your answer? Most, if they would be members of any “church”, would probably reply by giving the name of their denomination. This, however, would not have been so in the first-century church, for denominations were then non-existent. While, at first, the early converts to Christ were Jewish, the gospel soon was preached also to gentiles, but the idea of a “Jewish Church” and a “Gentile Church” would have been completely foreign to God’s plan for “one fold (the church) and one Shepherd (Christ)” (John 10:16). Jesus, on the evening He was betrayed, prayed for believers: “That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be one in us,, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me” (John 17:21). While there were different terms used in relation to believers in Christ, such as “body of Christ,” “the Way,” and “disciples” of Christ, the one that would be most significant was the name “Christian,” designating those who were followers of Christ. As the church began to include gentiles in the fold, and the apostle Paul began fulfilling his calling to “bear (Christ’s) name among the gentiles” (Acts 9:15), Luke tells us that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Peter would later admonish suffering believers, writing that if any would suffer as a Christian, he should not be ashamed, but rather, “glorify God in that name” (1 Pet. 4:16b, ESV). Denominational names are divisive and sectarian in nature, and are far from glorifying God. The name “Christian” in no way should divide true Christians from one another, but only to recognize the believer’s separation from a non-believing world.

In the New Testament, which is our authority for our faith and practice, all who believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God who died for their sins and was raised again, repented of their sins, unashamedly confessed Him, and were buried with Him in baptism were just Christians—neither more nor less. (cf. Acts 11:26; 28; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39). Why should it be otherwise today? If you respond in faith and obedience to the gospel as they did, you would become what they were—a Christian. If you would “in word and deed, do all in the name of (by the authority of) the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17), continuing in His word, you will continue to simply be what they were—Christians. Jesus’ words to His followers then should yet be heeded today: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31), and as a disciple, bear the name “Christian” (Acts 11:26). –Ron

“AS WE GROW OLDER, infirmities increase and heaven holds more and more of our loved ones: so heaven gets sweeter as the years go by. ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus?’ (Revelation 22:20, KJV)”

(Cecil May, Jr., *Gospel Advocate*, August, 2017)

GOD’S MIGHTY WORK

My family and I were recently able to travel out West and visit some of the most breathtaking sights in our country. This was not our first time. As a matter of fact, it was our fourth trip out West in the last two years. We have fallen in love with the climate, landscape, and adventures. During this latest trip we were able to drive some roads that we had never been down before. And the beauty of the land did not disappoint.

It is interesting how within a 100 mile radius the scenery can change so dramatically. From towering cedars to miles of desolate land and scrub brush. From Painted Desert to the red rocks of Monument Valley. God’s mighty work is beyond compare. David says it well: “O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Psalm 8:1).

As we experience life here on earth, it is easy to get caught up in our routine. There are times where we move from one task to the next with little thought to the world around us. Some go their whole lives without ever recognizing the beauty of creation. It’s not that they are blind to the beauty of the landscape. It’s that they are blind to the Creator of that beauty. They see the splendor around them, but not the splendor of God who made the heavens and the earth. How sad that is.

God has done many wonderful things, including creating us in His image. May our lives be a vehicle through which the mighty work of God is on display! --Keith Harris, Little Rock, Ark.

LORD, BE PRAISED

I remember early in life that the shortest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 117, the longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119, and the middle chapter is Psalm 118. Whether that is completely accurate depends on who you ask. A lot of times, things that are small are overlooked, maybe even seen as insignificant. But it was Jesus who challenged His followers to have the faith of a mustard seed, a very small and seemingly insignificant seed by comparison to other seeds. But when planted, the mustard seed grows into a garden plant

with branches large enough for birds to perch in them. Just because something is small doesn't mean it is insignificant.

So think about the shortest chapter, Psalm 117:

"Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol Him, all peoples! For great is His steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!"

This short chapter is filled with words too deep for our full comprehension. Think about God's steadfast love toward us. Are we able to fully comprehend the depth of His love? I am convinced we will never be able to grasp the fullness of God's love. We are able to see His love. We are able to speak of His love. But who among us would give their only child for the life of another? When this question is raised, we must understand that God gave His only Son for us even though we are not righteous people, but sinners. Who would do that?

Think about God's faithfulness. Over and over the Bible explains that God will never leave us nor forsake us. God Himself promises that He will be with us always. Truly He is. God keeps His promises. He is faithful to His word. His faithfulness is everlasting, enduring forever.

So I say with the psalmist, *"Praise the Lord!"* I say to our loving, faithful God, *"Lord, be praised!"* --Keith Harris, Little Rock, Ark.

TODAY'S MESSAGE: "A TOUGH CHOICE" (Conclusion—"Faith Wins Out!") will be today's message, with Daniel 3:19-30 as the reading.

Do YOU HAVE A QUESTION? I would welcome questions concerning Biblical subjects and passages of Scripture. Let me know, and I will attempt to address it in future lessons.

PRAYER LIST: Larry Primmer, a friend of Mary's who has been attending with her, reports good news regarding a prior ear-cancer surgery. His doctor says there is no trace of the cancer remaining, and has only one spot that is needing healing. Continue to remember: Doris continues with at-home-therapy and nurse visits twice a week, which are helping; Ruby Bradd (Clinton; recovering nicely following cancer surgery); Wayne Polk (Shelbyville minister; health problems).