

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