

You Can Be Just a Christian!

By

Jim Massey

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INTRODUCTION

How wonderful it is that one can be a Christian only! Had you ever thought about that? If not, please do. If you will read through this book, you will have it impressed on your mind to the point that I doubt that you will ever be able to forget it.

I count the author of this work as a special friend. I have known him for a number of years as a teacher, missionary, preacher, and writer. He has taught in Alabama Christian College, Montgomery, Alabama; Lubbock Christian College and Sunset School of Preaching, Lubbock, Texas; and is presently teaching at International Bible College in Florence, Alabama. He and his family have served as missionaries in Nigeria and Trinidad.

Brother Massey is a great believer in Christian literature and has written extensively in an effort to spread the gospel in different parts of the world. I am grateful to him for giving permission to print his materials here in India. I am sure that all who read this book will greatly profit by it.

J. C. Choate
Church of Christ
New Delhi
Oct. 2, 1981

SECOND EDITION INTRODUCTION

This book was originally prepared for the work in Africa and was later printed here in the States. Then we obtained permission from brother Massey to print it in India, which we have done, and now we are publishing it again in the States.

We intend to use it here and we will also be sending it to many mission points throughout the world. We feel that the kind of material it contains is the very type of thought-provoking articles that the non-Christian and the new Christian need. We are grateful to brother Massey for permitting the printing of this book for these purposes.

J. C. Choate
Winona, MS
February 6, 1985

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YOU CAN BE JUST A CHRISTIAN!

If I should come to your door with a new car, you would likely ask, "What kind?" Suppose I said, "No kind, just a car!" You would not believe me, since there are no cars today which are not "kinds" of cars.

Our thinking is the same way about churches. If I say that I am a Christian you immediately ask, "What kind?" You cannot imagine a Christian who is not some "kind" of Christian. You cannot conceive of "the church" except as some "kind" of church.

We have all grown up in a world full of churches. We didn't start them, we didn't cause them, we didn't want them. We simply inherited them. Exactly as we think of cars, we think there are no churches except "kinds" of churches.

But the original car, the very first one, was not any "kind" of car. It was just a car — "the" car. People then did not think of "kinds" of cars — there were no kinds. There was just "the" original and only car.

Since that original car many kinds of cars have been built. Our world today is full of "kinds" of cars. In fact, we cannot even think of

a car without thinking of a “kind.” But the first car wasn’t any “kind.”

You can be just a Christian – exactly like the original Christians – not any “kind” – just a Christian. You can be in the church – the original church – not any “kind” of church – just the church.

Would you continue this little booklet to be convinced that “You can be just a Christian”?

DOES GOD EXIST?

The Bible opens with “In the beginning God . . .” Is there really a God? How can I be sure? What is the evidence? Does God exist?

Psalms 19:1 says that the heavens declare the glory of God. Psalms 8:1 says that God has set His glory above the heavens. The universe of galaxies, suns, planets, and moons is evidence for God.

There is precise order in the universe. The heavenly bodies show planning and design. Design implies a designer. Ordered precision cannot happen by accident. Order in the universe is evidence for God.

Hebrews 3:4 says, “Every house is builded by some man, but he that built all things is God.” Every house is the product of planning and

design. It can't happen by accident by itself. Every house has a designer. So does the universe.

Romans 1:20 says that God's invisible traits are clearly seen by the things He has made. Everything that is made has a maker. A watch has a maker. It could not have happened by itself. Webster's big unabridged dictionary didn't happen by an explosion in a print shop!

The heavens declare God's glory. The universe is evidence for God. Intelligent planning is behind all ordered design. It is impossible to believe that the heavens and the earth had no planner. If houses cannot just happen, how could worlds?

WHAT OTHER EVIDENCE IS THERE FOR GOD?

Psalms 139:14 says, "I will praise God, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." The human body with all its complicated, interwoven, and living systems are proof of a designer.

Suppose I said that no mind was necessary to design and produce a car. Could you believe that the coordinated interdependent, interworking systems of an automobile just happened by accident? Could blundering chance produce a car?

No car just happened. Each one is the product of a designer and maker. There is a mind behind the design of every machine. But the human body is a far more marvelous machine than a car. It is alive. It repairs itself. It can think and reason so as to design and produce a machine as complicated as a car.

It has self-restoring, self-repairing healing systems. Its ears are a sophisticated stereophonic auditory system. It has a tireless system of muscles. Its digestive system is rugged yet precise. Its taste-smell machinery is sensitive and analytical. Its skeleton is well engineered. Its blood circulation system is extensive and trouble-free.

It has a computerized memory-bank brain. It has a very sensitive nerve network. It has a programmed glandular-hormone system. Its respiratory system inhales warmed and filtered air. It has a ventilation-insulation skin envelope. Its waste recycle and disposal machinery is effective. It has a reproductive system which is unfathomable. Its voice and language mechanisms are unique. It has an elaborate danger warning reaction system. Its eyes have wide-angle, living-color lenses which are alive.

Could such marvelous machinery have come from blundering chance? Did man just happen? Or must we not conclude that supreme

intelligence designed and created man? Man must praise God for man's body is fearfully and wonderfully made.

HOW IS THE BIBLE EVIDENCE FOR GOD?

God has two books that speak of his glory: creation and revelation. Psalms 19:1-7 speaks of both books, "The heavens declare the glory of God" and "the law of the Lord is perfect." Just as the universe is beyond man's power to have produced, so is the Bible.

Nicodemus said to Jesus, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). The great supernatural powers of Jesus proved He was from God, and the great supernatural powers of the Bible prove it came from God. No man could have produced the Bible.

The Bible has an historical accuracy beyond man's power. It covers man's history from the beginning. It begins in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, where we know civilization began (Gen. 2:14). It traces the detailed history of the Jews with uncanny accuracy to known facts. It told of the Hittite nation, when historians didn't believe there were such people, only to be proved

accurate when the Hittite culture was discovered in Turkey. The Bible's long and detailed coverage of history with no mistakes is evidence of superhuman power.

The Bible shows a knowledge of science beyond man's power. In Isaiah's day, 800 years before Christ, it told of the "circle of the earth" (Isa. 40:22), though men until the fifteenth century thought the earth was flat. Job's ancient book spoke of the earth's hanging on nothing (Job 26:7), though legend said Atlas or a huge turtle supported it. The Bible showed knowledge of the germ theory of disease 3,000 years before man learned it (Lev. 13). These are scientific truths beyond man's powers when written.

The Bible's superhuman geographic exactness is evidence for God. The two names of the very Greek gods which the Bible said were worshipped in the city of Lystra (Acts 14:12) were found on the city gate. Countless cities, waters, and mountains are still observable as accurately described in Scripture.

WHAT OTHER EVIDENCES IN SCRIPTURE SHOW SUPREME INTELLIGENCE?

Prophecy in the Bible is superhuman knowledge of the future. Daniel 2 lists successive

world empires which followed exactly as predicted. Isaiah 13:19-22 predicted the most unlikely utter destruction of Babylon, the world's greatest city, but it happened exactly as spoken. More than 200 details about Jesus were prophesied and fulfilled precisely.

The Bible's amazing unity is not from man but from the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:3). Forty men of different countries, cultures, and languages wrote over a period of 1600 years, yet in perfect harmony. They described abstract things – spirits, angels, love, truth – the hardest concepts of all to describe, yet without contradiction. This is a feat no group of men could have accomplished unassisted by divine power.

The Bible's tremendous influence is beyond human ability. It is the only book giving the satisfying answers for the deepest problems and needs of man. The Bible has shaped the course of Western civilization. Wherever it has gone, freedom, the value of life, and the enabling of mankind have followed. Its principles made America great and elevated the stature of thousands of the world's greatest leaders. No human book could have had such influence.

If everywhere we are able to check up on the Bible, we find it true – such as when it crosses path with history, science, and geography – surely we can believe it where we can't check –

such as its teaching about the soul, about the hereafter, and about man's reason for existence. The Bible is trustworthy in every realm. It is evidence of superhuman power. No man could do these things except God be with him.

HOW DID WE GET OUR BIBLE?

The Bible was originally communicated through inspired men by the Holy Spirit. David said the Lord's Word was upon his tongue (II Sam. 23:2). The apostles were guided into all truth (John 16:13). Paul said that the message he preached was not from man but by revelation from Christ (Gal. 1:11, 12). Peter said inspired men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21).

These words were not the words of men's wisdom but words of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:13). They were not the commands of men but of God (I Cor. 14:37). All Scripture is inspired of God and completely furnishes the Christian unto every good work (II Tim. 3:16, 17).

Since God wrote the Bible, He could certainly preserve it. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). In God's wisdom all original manuscripts have been lost, probably

lest we worship them. But their message has been accurately and providentially preserved.

About 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament have been found – one from within fifty years of the original, several others from the third, fourth and fifth centuries. Extremely ancient translations of the New Testament have been found which are even earlier than the major manuscripts.

Besides manuscripts and versions, another source for reconstructing the original New Testament is early quotations from Christians, who copied in their writings the verses of the Bible from the early second century onward. Two famous language scholars, Drs. Westcott and Hort, said that besides minor trivialities, the words still subject to doubt were “a thousandth part of the whole.” The Bible is easily the world’s most accurately preserved book. Jesus’ words have not passed away.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE’S THEME?

God made man for fellowship with Himself. God walked with Adam in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). Enoch and Noah walked with God. But God wanted man’s fellowship only if man could choose to walk with God. Any mechanical or forced kind did not satisfy.

This required the possibility of sin so that man could have a choice. Forbidden fruit was necessary (Gen. 2:17). Man has always been given the choice of good or evil (Deut. 11:26). Man must choose whom he will serve (Josh. 24:15).

Because God's nature can't stand sin (Rom. 1:18), man's disobedience breaks fellowship with God (Isa. 59:2). Because man's nature loves to sin (Rom. 7:23), God had to provide man a way to overcome sin so as to restore fellowship.

God made an early promise (Gen. 3:15) that the descendant (seed) of woman would overcome Satan (the serpent). This theme is carried throughout the Bible. Jesus was that descendant and was manifested to destroy the works of the Devil (I John 3:8). Christians because of Christ can bruise Satan under their feet (Rom. 16:20).

The theme promise was repeated to Abraham. In his seed all families and nations would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). To bring Abraham's descendant into the world required a nation and a land (Gen. 12:2, 7). Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem in Canaan and of the race of Israel, Abraham's descendants.

Galatians 3:8 says that the Gospel was preached beforehand to Abraham when God said that all nations were to be blessed in his seed.

That seed was Christ (vs. 16). God's great plan was to save man from sin through a Savior so as to restore the broken fellowship. This is the theme of the Bible.

HOW WAS THIS PLAN OR THEME ACCOMPLISHED?

The New Testament clearly shows that the forgiveness of sin was the meaning of the covenant promise to Abraham (Acts 3:25, 26). All else in God's dealing with Israel was but a means to this end. Man's only problem is his sin. His only need is for forgiveness.

Israel was afflicted by Egypt but was led out by Moses (Gen. 15:13, 14). God then imprisoned the Jews by the Law so that they would want the deliverance of a Savior (Gal. 3:23). They didn't want out of Egypt until they saw that it was captivity. Man doesn't want out of sin until he sees that it is a prison (John 8:34).

The Law of Moses was God's way of cataloging man's sins and showing man how futile and desperate sin's bondage is (Gal. 3:10, 11). The fact that man could not perfectly keep God's standards of right and wrong showed him he was cursed by his own sin and needed a Savior (Rom. 7:23, 24, 25). God's plan for the Law was to be

a tutor to bring man to Christ (Gal. 3:24).

When God's timetable was complete, Jesus was born of a woman (Gal. 4:4). The descendant of the woman fulfilled the prophecy that He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). The apostles preached that in Jesus was proclaimed the remission of sins (Acts 13:38).

By faith in Christ Jesus men are baptized into Christ and put on Christ (Gal. 3:26, 27). This makes men heirs of the promises made to Abraham (vs. 29), because their fellowship with God is restored.

All the prophets spoke with one mouth of the suffering of Jesus for man's sin (Acts 3:18). When men repent of sins and are converted to Christ, their sins are blotted out and their fellowship with God and the refreshing of His presence is restored (vs. 19). God's scheme of redemption is fulfilled in forgiveness of sins in Christ and restored fellowship between God and man.

DID JESUS REALLY LIVE, OR IS HE LEGENDARY?

Non-Christian historians who opposed Christianity in the second century clearly verify His life and death exactly as the Bible teaches. Tacitus about 115 A.D. said, "Christus suffered

the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate” (Annals 15:44).

This non-Christian Roman historian further says that Christians had their name from Christus (Latin for Christ) and had spread what he called their “mischievous superstition” from Judea to Rome. These factual times and places are exactly as listed in Luke 3:1, 2; Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:7.

A Roman provincial governor named Pliny wrote letters to his emperor Trajan about 110 A.D. explaining that Christians in his province were in the “habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ as to a God” (Letters 10:96). Just as Acts records, Christianity had spread into Asia Minor, and Christ was worshipped as a God.

Therefore, there can be no doubt that Jesus lived and died exactly as the Bible says. There is no doubt that his followers spread His message throughout the Roman world and praised Him as a God. If I believe that Tiberius Caesar lived, I have to believe that Jesus lived.

What I must surely decide is, was He God in flesh, as history tells us men said He was. If not, He was the world’s greatest liar, because He said He was God. He was either the Son of God

or a maniac who thought He was God. His historical validity is beyond dispute, His historicity is beyond question, and His deity, when carefully examined, is amply proven.

WAS JESUS' DEATH REAL OR FICTITIOUS?

Time Magazine in its January 18, 1971, "Science" section had a long article entitled, "A Death in Jerusalem." It told how Israeli construction workers in June, 1968, uncovered the tomb of a twenty year old crucifix victim who died sometime between seven and seventy A. D. His foot was pierced by a rusty seven inch nail. The forearm bone had been grazed by another nail.

The article explained the purpose of crucifixion – to prolong the victim's death agony as long as possible. The hanging position was more erect than usually pictured, since a victim hanging on suspended arms would soon suffocate from unexpelled breath. Jesus died exactly as the Bible says – a cruel, lingering agony in public hatred and shame.

His suffering was not just a legend. His death was not just a fable. His shame was not superstition. A man like Jesus would have been put to death by the Romans exactly as the Bible

says Jesus was. His substitutionary death for our sins is not only factual, but the greatest fact of all time.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL? WHY IS IT GOOD NEWS?

The English word “gospel” comes from the town crier’s “good spell” which was an announcement of great news. The Gospel of Christ is the momentous news that Jesus died for sinners, was buried and was raised as Lord and Savior (I Cor. 15:1-4). Why is this such great news?

The greatest fact of heaven and earth is the existence of God in heaven. The greatest fact of human history is God’s plan for redeeming man. All aspects of God’s dealings with man are determined by the nature or character of God. Who God is decides what He does. He cannot act contrary to His being. God’s will is just the outgrowth of His character.

God is absolutely holy. His nature is repulsed by sin. His presence made dirt into holy ground (Ex. 3:5). His name is holy and reverend (Psa. 111:9). He alone is holy (Rev. 15:4). Man must become holy to have fellowship with God. I Peter 1:16 says, “Ye shall be holy for I am holy.”

Man is basically sinful, his nature is ungodly or un-god-like. The thoughts of his heart are only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). There is not a righteous man on the earth that doeth good and sinneth not (Eccl. 7:20). There is none righteous, no not one (Rom. 3:10). All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (vs. 23). Man is fleshly, sold under sin. In his flesh dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:14-24).

God is perfectly just. He executes absolute justice. His basic character demands that He fully punish every sin. He cannot (instead of will not) look on sin (Hab. 1:13). Wickedness is an abomination to Him (Prov. 15:8). His wrath is against all ungodliness and unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). His judgment is according to truth (Rom. 2:2). His judgment of sin is just, and He will exactly render to every man according to his works (vss. 5, 6). Every sin receives a just recompense of reward (Heb. 2:2).

Law doesn't remedy man's sin problem. To tell a child not to do wrong may even make him want more to do it. The nature of law is to expose and intensify sin, but by its nature it is not the remedy. The purpose of law is to condemn. It has no power to justify (Rom. 3:20), instead it only brings the knowledge of sin. It came into God's dealings with man "that the trespass might abound" (Rom. 5:20), that sin

might become exceedingly sinful (Rom. 7:13). It was “added because of transgressions till the seed should come” (Gal. 3:19). Breaking one point makes one guilty of all (James 2:10).

Since God is holy and man is sinful, since God must punish every sin, and law is not the answer, how can God and man ever be compatible? Since man can never be right on his own, and God can never tolerate sin in man, what could possibly remedy man’s sin problem? “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:24, 25).

HOW DID CHRIST DIE FOR US?

The Gospel is the great good news that Christ suffered sin’s penalty in man’s place. Jesus as my substitute took my place and satisfied God’s wrath in His death on the cross. Paul defines the Gospel as Christ’s death for our sins and burial and resurrection according to the Scriptures (I Cor. 15:1-4).

Isaiah 53 foretold that He “hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was smitten of God and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities, the punishment of our peace with God

was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. The Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. The Lord shall see the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Knowledge of Him will justify many, and he shall bear their iniquities. He poured out His soul into death. He was numbered with transgressors, yet he bare the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors" (vss. 4-12).

Him who knew no sin God made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (II Cor. 5:21). He bare our sins in His body on the tree (I Pet. 2:24). He suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous that He might bring us to God (I Pet. 3:18). Because of Christ's death for us, God now can be both just (perfectly punish sin) and justifier (make man just) of him that has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

Except for the death of Jesus, God had no choice but to punish man's sin. But since Jesus took upon Himself man's punishment, God now is still just in punishing every sin (upon Jesus), but he can forgive and justify those men who believe in Jesus, so that they do not have to suffer punishment for their sins. The Gospel is the good news that Christ suffered sin's penalty in man's place.

WHAT IS THE BASIS OF MAN'S SALVATION?

The only grounds for man's forgiveness is Jesus' death. Romans 5:19 says that the obedience of One will make many righteous. Peter preached that remission of sins was "in the name" (Greek: on the basis) of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). He also said, "Through this man is proclaimed the remission of sins" (Acts 13:38). Jesus' death is God's means of man's salvation.

How then does man receive this justification given "freely" (Greek: without cause) to man (Rom. 3:24)? He accepts it as a total gift by responding in obedient faith. Man's trust in God's sin-offering causes man to be united with Christ's death in baptism (Rom. 6:3-5). The believer contacts Christ's saving blood by being baptized into His death (Eph. 1:7; Col. 2:12). Man becomes a child of God by being baptized into Christ to put on Christ (Gal. 3:26, 27).

When the Ethiopian came to trust in Jesus as God's sin-offering, as taught in Isaiah 53, he immediately wanted to be baptized so as to contact the death of Christ where forgiveness is (Acts 8:28-39). By being baptized into Jesus' death a believer is united with Christ in the likeness of His death (a burial) to come forth a new creature in Christ (Rom. 6:3-5).

Baptism is not the basis of salvation. It is

rather the point of man's salvation. When Saul was told to be baptized to "wash away" his sins (Acts 22:16), he understood clearly that Jesus' blood washes sins away, but baptism is the "when," not the "what," of sins forgiven.

After Peter had preached repentance and baptism "on the basis" of Jesus' name, he then said that repentance and baptism were "for" (Greek: for the purpose of) the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Man's response by repenting and being baptized are not acts or works which achieve or deserve salvation. They are merely responses of a trusting faith which bring a believer into the death of Jesus and into contact with His saving blood. Jesus said that when the Gospel was preached to every creature, men were to believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:15, 16).

WAS ORIGINAL CHRISTIANITY DENOMINATIONAL?

Since we have all grown up in a world of denominational churches, it is hard to think of the undivided church of the first century. Just because a condition of division exists today does not mean that it originally did in the church. Paul said that though men called the church a

“sect” in his day, yet after that way he served the God of his fathers (Acts 24:14).

The Gospel was preached in Jerusalem in Acts 2. Three thousand Jews became Christians (vs. 41), and the Lord added them to the church (vs. 47). Becoming a Christian in the first century by the same act added one to the church. The original church was simply Christians. Christianity and the church were the same.

In Antioch the Lord Jesus was preached (Acts 11:20). A great number believed and turned to the Lord (vs. 21). They were thus added to the Lord (vs. 24). These people added to the Lord were called “disciples,” “Christians,” and “the church” (vs. 26). They weren’t any “kind” of Christians – just Christians. They weren’t in any “kind” of church – just the church.

People in Corinth heard, believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8). Paul wrote to them as “the church of God at Corinth” (I Cor. 1:2). He told them to all teach (or speak) the same thing and to have no divisions among them (I Cor. 1:10). He said that God is not the author of confusion but of peace (I Cor. 14:33). Original Christianity was undenominational.

WHAT DOES THE WORD "CHURCH" MEAN?

Our careless use of the word "church" causes confusion in our concept of Christianity. Many may mean a building, others may mean a denomination, or some may mean all denominations are the church.

The original Greek word for "church" always means a "called out" group of people. Acts 7:38 describes the "church in the wilderness." These were Jewish people "called out" of Egypt. Saul of Tarsus persecuted the "church" in Acts 8:1-3 when he dragged "men and women" to prison. The church is "called out" people.

Therefore, whenever anyone is "called out" of sin by becoming a Christian, he is automatically in the church, the called out group of Christians. No one in the Bible ever "joined" the church. The Lord adds the saved to the church at the moment they become saved (Acts 2:47).

The "called out" people in a certain city are a local church. The church at Corinth, the church at Philippi, the church at Ephesus are a few of many local churches in the New Testament. Far more than any other use of the word "church," local churches are most often meant in Scripture when we read the word "church." The "church" is always "called out" people.

WHAT OTHER BIBLE TERMS DESCRIBE THE CHURCH?

Because first century people lived under kings, the church is called a kingdom. Like kings who freed people from the oppression of other kings, God delivers us out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13). Never did first century people think of “your kingdom” or “my kingdom” in regard to the church. There was only the dark kingdom of sin and the kingdom of Christ, the church. Submitting to king Jesus enables God to deliver us into the kingdom.

The church is God’s family over which He is Father (Matt. 6:9). The church is called the “house” or family of God (I Tim. 3:15). Jesus said that a person is “born again” of “water and Spirit” to enter God’s family or kingdom (John 3:3, 5). Paul says that we become children of God by faith when we are baptized into Christ to put on Christ (Gal. 3:26, 27). God’s family is the church, and being born again makes one a child in the family.

Three times the church is called the “body” of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18, 24). Jesus is the “head” and all Christians are “members” or organs in the spiritual body. I Cor. 12:13 says that we are baptized “into one body.”

This means that one enters Christ's body, the church, at the point of baptism, since "into" means "from without to within."

These and many other comparisons of the church show that membership in the original first century church was enjoyed at the moment of becoming a Christian. They also show the oneness of the church, since God has only one kingdom, one family, and Christ as head has only one body (Eph. 4:4).

IS THE CHURCH IMPORTANT OR INCIDENTAL IN THE BIBLE?

Since the church is the saved (Acts 2:47), to ask if the church is important is to ask if Christianity is important. Jesus Himself built the church and promised that the gates of Hades would not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). He purchased the church with his blood, since He purchased Christians with His blood (Acts 20:28). He loved the church and gave Himself up for it (Eph. 5:25).

God as our Father knew our need for family help. Christ as our head knew our need for working together as parts of his body. The church is, therefore, God's means of growth and strength for Christians. We cannot live the

Christian life alone. We need the oversight of shepherds who watch for our souls (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17). Our need for the church is vital. It is spiritual, not social.

Ephesians 4:16 beautifully describes the spiritual inter-action of growth and work in the church: "From whom (Christ) all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love."

HOW DID ORIGINAL CHRISTIANITY BECOME DIVIDED?

The Bible shows clearly how the church in the New Testament became corrupted and splintered. The congregations in Galatia had men who troubled them by "perverting" the Gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:7). To "pervert" is to corrupt by changing. The Devil perverted God's statement to Adam and Eve, "Thou shalt surely die" by adding only one word, "Thou shalt not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). A perverted Gospel message in Galatia necessarily perverted the church.

II Timothy 4:1 4 commands Timothy to

preach the Word because men would not endure sound doctrine but would turn their ears away from the truth to fables or foolish stories. It is the tendency of mankind to turn away from God's way to man's own way. When the truth of God was turned away from, necessarily the church was changed, since it is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:15).

I Timothy 4:1-4 predicted that men would depart or fall away from the faith. Since Christianity was often called "the faith" (Acts 6:7), this Scripture shows that other faiths would be originated when men depart from the one true faith. Though there is but one faith (Eph. 4:5), men soon departed from it and brought other faiths or beliefs into the church. Naturally when the faith was departed from, the church was departed from, since the church is the "household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Romans 16:17 warns Christians in Rome to "mark" teachers who caused divisions and occasions of stumbling contrary to "the doctrine" which they had learned and to avoid them. This shows that the doctrine of Christ was soon corrupted. We must continue steadfastly in the "apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). If we do not abide in the doctrine of Christ we do not have God (II John 9). But teachers in Rome and elsewhere soon brought divisions and stumblings by corrupting the doctrine of Christ.

WHAT IS A DENOMINATION AND HOW DID DENOMINATING BEGIN?

I Corinthians 1:10-13 is a clear-cut explanation of the beginning of denominationalism. After Paul had left Corinth, the people began to wear the names of their teachers: "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas" (vs. 12). Paul asked, "Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (vs. 13). He thanked God that he had only baptized two or more of them because his name and the names of other preachers were causing divisions (vs. 15).

This is what denominating is. The word comes from "de" meaning "by" and "nomin" meaning "name." A denomination is a "named division" or a "division resulting from its name." Denominations of a dollar are the names of its parts: pennies, nickles, dimes, quarters, and halves. The denominator of a fraction like $\frac{1}{2}$ is the 2 which divides these fractions as "halves" from other fractions such as "thirds."

Christians in Corinth were denominating themselves by wearing the names of the preachers who baptized them, thus dividing the church into "named divisions" or denominations. Paul demanded that "there be no divisions among you" (vs. 10). Denominating divides Christ (vs. 13) by dividing His spiritual body, the

church. Jesus prayed that His followers might all be one as He and God are one (John 17:21).

Denomination is a bad word. Though we have grown up in a world which accepts it, it is unscriptural and sinful to denominate ourselves. The world thinks "lust" is a good and popular word, but the Bible shows that it is a bad word. The application forms which we fill out will often ask, "What denomination?" as if to be a Christian required denominating and as if the word were honorable.

The early church was soon denominated, but the apostles condemned the practice. They condemned name-wearing which divided Christians. The same Bible condemns denominating today. The names are different, but the sin is the same. Denominating is a sin which began very early in the church. It has multiplied and become widely accepted today.

WHAT ARE SOME BIBLE WORDS FOR RELIGIOUS DIVISION?

In Acts 24:14 Paul said that the way in which he served God was called by men a "sect." Christianity was thought of as a "sect" and was everywhere spoken against (Acts 28:22). "Sectarianism" is a bad word. It has been the cause of

open warfare in Ireland. To be a "sectarian" is to be narrow and divisive. Yet, this is a Bible word for denominating.

Another word is "heresy." Heresies are called "damnable" in II Pet. 2:1. A heresy is a religious division resulting from a strange teaching. It makes a person a "heretic." Have you ever heard anyone say, "You have your heresy and I have mine?" Would we put on application forms, "What heresy are you a member of?" Yet, "heresy" is a Bible word for denominating and accurately gives its meaning.

A third word for denominating is "parties." This is the American Standard Version reading of "heresies" in Gal. 5:20. It helps us to see the true nature of denominating. All Americans are American citizens, but not all are members of the American Citizens Party. The proper Bible concept of the church is like American citizens, since all Christians are the church. But the denominational concept of using some Bible names to divide a group from all other Christians is a corruption which destroys unity.

Let us call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways. "Parties" are works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20). "Heresies" are damnable (II Pet. 2:1). "Sectarianism" is a misunderstanding of Christianity (Acts 24:14; 28:22). "Denominationalism" is condemned

(I Cor. 1:10-13). But strangely this last word has traditionally become respectable and acceptable in our world.

IS THERE AN ACTUAL PREDICTION THAT THE CHURCH WOULD BE DEPARTED FROM?

Acts 20:28-30 is such a prophecy. Paul here warned elders from Ephesus to take heed to the church which Christ purchased with His blood. He uses the figure of a flock. The flock here is clearly a comparison for the church (vs. 28). They needed to take heed to the flock because something was to happen to the flock (or church).

In verse 29 Paul says that grievous wolves would enter in not sparing the flock. Wolves which cause grief would scatter the flock (the church). These wolves were to be men speaking perverse (perverted) things, that is, teachers who would change the truth into error. This would draw away disciples after the false teachers. Thus groups of people would be drawn away from the church, the flock.

These would be new churches begun by splintering the church of the Lord (or church of God, King James Version). The Lord's church was to be splintered and false churches begun.

This would be caused by changes or perversions in teaching which lead men away from the church of the Lord.

These things happened as Paul predicted. The flock was not spared. It was led away from. The church of the Lord was departed from. Perverted teaching led men into perverted churches. The church was departed from, like the Gospel, like the truth, like the faith, like the doctrine, and like the unity were departed from. And for the same reason — men depart from God's way.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT THIS CONDITION?

Jude 3 gives the answer: "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." The faith was given once for all to Christians. But it must be contended earnestly for in all generations. "Error" means "straying," and men are prone to err from God's way. Contending earnestly is turning out of error back to truth.

Because we have been born into a world of religious perversions, we must contend earnestly for the original faith. We must back up and hook on to Christianity before it was perverted. The original Gospel must be restored in the place

of a perverted gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). The original truth must be preached as before it was turned away from (II Tim. 4:1-4).

The original faith must be contended for as it was before men departed from it (I Tim. 4:1-4). We must return to the original doctrine of Christ and the apostles before men corrupted it (Rom. 16:17). We must restore the original unity of the church before denominating divided it (I Cor. 1:10-13). We must restore the original church of the Lord as it was before men were led away from it (Acts 20:28-30).

But this contending must be done earnestly (Jude 3). It will not be easy to stem the tide of centuries of tradition. We all like to remain satisfied and settled in our inherited traditional way. To restore original Christianity in a tradition-bound world is a task needing the help of God. But by Him it is possible.

God would not have said to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints if this were not possible. Every command of God is possible. He never requires the impossible. But he often demands the difficult. I can either remain complacent and drift along in an inherited faith, or I can see what has happened, make a determined resolve, and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Most of us will do the easier.

ISN'T IT NARROW-MINDED TO CONTEND FOR ONE CHURCH?

Ephesians 4:3-7 says that it is not. Here Paul commands Christians to endeavor to keep the unity produced by the Holy Spirit. This means that the Spirit has given in the early church and in the original faith a unity which must be kept. Because our world hasn't kept the original unity given by the Spirit, we must endeavor to restore and keep it.

The passage says: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." We are then told what that unity is: "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." After commanding us to keep the Holy Spirit's unity, Paul describes that unity: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God.

The first thing Paul mentioned was one body. We are commanded to keep the unity of the Spirit by contending for one body. Earlier in this letter to Ephesian Christians Paul has said that the body was the church (Eph. 1:22, 23), we must keep the Spirit's unity by teaching one body or church.

This unity demands that there be one

Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Though many false spirits are in the world (I John 4:1), Christians know the one Spirit from Scripture and contend for Him against all false spirits, though many people may follow them.

Holy Spirit unity demands one hope, not many. Instead of many roads to heaven there is one (Matt. 7:13, 14). There is one Lord – Jesus. Though there are many called lords in our world (I Cor. 8:5), Jesus is the only true Lord. All others are false, and I must contend earnestly for the one true Lord of the Bible.

I must contend for the unity which is based upon one faith. Though my world popularly believes in many faiths, the one in the Bible is the only true one. I am not narrow-minded if I contend for the one faith of the Bible (Jude 3).

There is one baptism, not several. Paul taught incorrectly baptized men in Ephesus to be properly baptized (Acts 19:1-5). I must show my world the true baptism of the Bible which must replace the false baptisms of men.

There is one God, though our world says that there are many (I Cor. 8:5). It is not narrow-minded to take the Bible and show men the one true God. But neither is it egotistical to take the Bible and show men the one true church – the body of Christ.

Unless I contend for the one true God of

Scripture, I cannot keep Holy Spirit unity. But I must also contend for one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope, and one church. Unless I do, I am not able to restore and keep Holy Spirit unity. I know that this is not narrow-minded, because I am commanded to do it as the only basis of true unity.

WERE EARLY CHRISTIANS IN ONE CHURCH?

An Ethiopian was convinced that Jesus died for his sins. He asked to be baptized immediately. He came up from the water rejoicing (Acts 8:32-39). Which church was he a member of? The Lord's church, which He Himself built (Matt. 16:18). A Philippian jailor was baptized after midnight because he believed Jesus was his sin-offering (Acts 16:30-34). What kind of Christian did this make him? No kind, just a Christian, or the Lord's kind, the only kind there is.

Were these newly born-again Christians in a denomination? If so, which one? Did they join a denomination after their conversion? No. Yet they were added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). They were delivered by God into the kingdom (Col. 1:13). They had been

baptized into Christ's body, the church (I Cor. 12:13). They were just Christians, members of the undenominational church of Jesus Christ.

Were these new Christians in the same church? Yes. Were they the same kind of Christians? Yes. Did they have one faith? Yes. Why then cannot we today? If we today become what they were, we will be exactly what they were, and nothing else. If they were only Christians, we can be only Christians — members of the church built and purchased by Jesus.

I would not blame people for refusing to be in my church, if I had a church. No New Testament Christian ever wanted anyone to be in his church. No one then had a church, but Jesus had a church, which all Christians were in. This can and must be true today.

WHAT KEEPS MEN FROM UNDERSTANDING UNDENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIANITY TODAY?

Tradition! What is handed down religiously from generation to generation! Inherited beliefs of parents and ancestors! The same was true in Jesus' day. The Jewish leaders were tradition-bound in their beliefs and practices. They honored the religious traditions of their fathers (Gal. 1:14).

Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that they transgressed the commandment of God by their tradition (Matt. 15:3). He said that they made void the Word of God by their tradition (vs. 6). He showed that they worshipped God in vain by teaching for doctrine the commandments of men (vs. 9).

God's Ten Commandment Law had said to honor or support one's parents (Ex. 20:12). These Jewish leaders had excused themselves from this command by giving a gift to God (Mark 7:11, 12). Since their leaders taught this, many gullible people followed. This is how religious tradition works.

God said one thing. The religious leaders said a different thing, and the people played follow the leader. It caused them to lay aside the commandment of God (Mark 7:8), to reject the commandment of God (vs. 9), to make the Word of God none effect because of their tradition (vs. 13).

The leaders were blind leaders. They were the blind leading the blind. Jesus said that both would fall into the ditch (Matt. 15:14). All doctrines and commandments of men will perish (Col. 2:22). They followed the commandments of men who turned away from the truth (Titus 1:14). Tradition in religion is tragic. It keeps men from understanding pure Christianity.

WHAT IS PREJUDICE?

Prejudice is pre-judging or deciding what I will believe before I learn the facts. Religious prejudice crucified Christ (John 15:25). It murdered Stephen (Acts 7:57). It caused men to resist the Gospel so as to be lost (Acts 13:45, 46). It still causes men today to resist the plain truth of Scripture.

Men of all ages have closed their eyes and stopped their ears to truth, because it disagreed with their cherished preconceptions (Matt. 13:15). The Devil snatches away newly-planted truth that has been sown in the heart (Matt. 13:19). Most people are happy with what they believe and do not wish to be bothered with the facts.

Men who do not want truth will find teachers according to their own wishes and desires. They will find those who will tickle their ears by teaching them what they enjoy hearing. They will turn away their ears from the truth and be turned aside unto fables (II Tim. 4:3, 4).

Because men don't love the truth (II Thess. 2:10), God sends them a strong delusion that they should believe a lie (vs. 11). They will be damned because they preferred pleasure in unrighteousness to truth (vs. 12). Even the Scriptures can be twisted (wrested) to one's own destruction (II Pet. 3:16).

Let us be like people in Berea who received God's Word with all readiness in mind and searched the Scriptures daily whether the things Paul taught were so (Acts 17:11). Otherwise, prejudice will blind men to God's simple truth (II Cor. 11:3).

**IS IT POSSIBLE FOR ME,
AN AVERAGE PERSON,
TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE?**

The common people heard Jesus gladly (Mark 12:37), and His message can be heard and understood gladly by common people today. The Gospel is the message of salvation for every creature (Mark 16:15). The Bible is not just for the highly educated or for the so-called "clergy," but for men and women in all conditions and positions of life. The Scriptures are written for our learning (Rom. 15:4). We are commanded to study so as to "rightly divide" them (II Tim. 2:15). Every person must give an account of himself to God (Rom. 14:12).

If the message of the Bible could not be understood by all people, then God would be unfair. For all shall be judged by the words of Christ (John 12:48). If these words are too difficult for some to grasp, then God is being

unjust. But God is not unfair or unjust; He is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34, 35). He treats all men impartially. His Word is understandable by all.

We are all commanded to understand the will of God (Eph. 5:17). God has never commanded man to do something which he could not do. Since we are required to understand, then we know that it is possible to understand, because God never requires the impossible of anyone.

This does not mean that a person must be highly trained to know the will of God. But it simply means that we must all be open-mindedly searching after truth. Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). If this is true of me, then it is altogether possible for me, an average person, to understand the Bible.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS?

We are instructed to study in order to "rightly divide" the Bible (II Tim. 2:15). This includes the proper separation between the Old and New Testaments. The word "testament"

means “will” or “plan.” God’s will or plan in the Old Testament must be understood, and the same is true for the New Testament.

The Old Testament was the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. From the beginning of sin in the Garden of Eden the Old Testament points forward to a Savior for sin. All of the animal sacrifices were pre-pictures of the coming of Christ who was to become the great and only sacrifice for sin.

The Jewish law of Moses was added under the Old Testament to show sin to be sin, because sin is “transgression of the law” (I John 3:4). The law was called a “schoolmaster” to prepare the world for the time of faith in Christ (Gal. 3:24). But when the time of faith in Christ came, men were no longer to be under the schoolmaster or the law (Gal. 3:25).

The Old Testament law successfully pointed out man’s sinfulness and his inability to keep a perfect standard. But “what the law could not do” was to provide salvation through a perfect sacrifice for sin (Rom. 8:3). In this way the Law prepared men by demonstrating their need for the coming Savior.

When Jesus finally came, and the purpose of the Law was fulfilled, He took it “out of the way nailing it to His cross” (Col. 2:14).

This means that after the coming of Christ the world was no longer under the commandments of the Old Testament. Those temporary agreements or “covenants” were replaced by the permanent plan of Christ or the “Gospel.” Therefore, Christians live according to the commandments of Christ, “the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Heb. 8:6). We do not return to the former laws such as the Sabbath days (Col. 2:16), for we are “dead to the law” that we should now be joined to Christ (Rom. 7:4).

Nevertheless, Christians can learn much from the Old Testament (Rom. 15:4). It is part of God’s complete revelation, but we must “rightly divide” the Word of God by seeing the purpose and place of the two Testaments.

HAVE THERE BEEN DIFFERENT AGES OR PERIODS OF GOD’S DEALINGS WITH MAN?

The history of God’s dealings with man can be divided into three different periods of time recorded throughout the Bible. The first period began at creation when God first began to deal with mankind. During this age of time God commanded Adam not to eat fruit of a certain

tree. He instructed Abraham to sacrifice his son, and He required Noah to build an ark. These commandments are seen to be quite different from the commandments of God in later ages. And although they are commandments which are in the Bible, they are not the way God deals with us today.

Beginning with Moses and the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai the second period or age of God's dealings with man began. In this age many specific ordinances were required such as animal sacrifices, the burning of incense, and harvest feasts. God's commandments for man were found in the Ten Commandments and other requirements of the law given through Moses.

The third division of Bible history begins with Christ after the Old Covenant had ended on the cross (Col. 2:14). The Day of Pentecost of Acts chapter two brought the beginning of the third and last period of God's arrangements with men. Christ had ascended back to heaven and on this day sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles who preached His Gospel for the first time under the Great Commission (Matt. 28: 18-20).

Never before had men been baptized because of their faith in the resurrected Savior. Never before this great day had men been able to know the full message of the Gospel which was

to be the plan of salvation for all future time. Never before had men and women been added to the church as 3,000 were on this day which was the beginning of the church Jesus promised to build (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:41, 47).

This Day of Pentecost of Acts two was the beginning of the “last days” or last period of Bible history (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:1, 2). It was the full beginning of the New Covenant or New Testament of Christ (Acts 11:15). God has been dealing with men since this day under the will of Christ and according to His teaching and commandments. There will not be any other age or new method of dealing with men, for Christ’s authority is to last until the end of time (Matt. 28:18-20). The Gospel or “the faith” has been “once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3), and men must give glory to God in Christ and in the church throughout all ages to come (Eph. 3:21).

A proper understanding of the three different periods of God’s dealings with man is necessary to “rightly divide” the Bible and to know God’s will to us today.

HOW DO I FORSAKE MEN’S TEACHINGS AND SUBMIT ONLY TO THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST?

All authority in heaven and earth is

committed to Christ (Matt. 28:18). By His resurrection from the dead He proved Himself to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4). How can I know when I am doing what He wants me to do?

When our Lord was on earth, He planned to leave the disciples. He said He would send the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth (John 16:13), and to call to their minds all things Christ had said to them (John 14:26). The apostles did not write and preach what they thought but what the Holy Spirit guided them to say. "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth" (I Cor. 2:13). The very words of the Scriptures are inspired or "Spirit-breathed" of God and are "able to make thee wise unto salvation" and to furnish the Christian unto all good works (II Tim. 3:15-17). The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). The things written in the Bible are there that men may believe in Christ and have eternal life through His name (John 20:30, 31).

One submits to the authority of Christ when he obeys only what is in the Bible. Christ now exercises His authority through His word. There is no other authority in religion. It is the only true catechism for the Christian.

WHO IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH AND HOW WAS IT ORGANIZED IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES?

The headship or organization of the church as recorded in the Bible is altogether different from that of denominational churches of the present day. For instance, no one in the Bible is called "head of the church" except Christ (Eph. 1:21-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18). The terms "pope" or "arch-bishop" are nowhere found in the Scriptures. Instead, Christ has "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18).

Likewise there is in the Bible no headquarters of the church on earth. A headquarters is the "quarters of the head," and Jesus, the only head of the church, is in heaven (Acts 1:9-11). We can see that men's churches have forsaken these important characteristics of the true church. Men's imaginations have dreamed up all sorts of boards, synods, councils, conferences, districts, and human church governments.

Another remarkable characteristic of the church in the Bible was the autonomy or independence of each congregation. Each church in each location had its own officers, and each member was free under Christ from ecclesiastical authority and control. The New Testament churches had no government or organization

larger than the local congregation. There were no officers outside or above the local church.

That each congregation might function most effectively Christ gave a simple plan of organization for each body of Christians. This plan of leadership was based upon the fundamental principle of example. From among the older and stronger men the congregation was to select those possessing certain high qualities of character as given in detail in I Tim. 3 and Titus 1. Because such men would be worthy of imitation by the other members, they would be called "elders" or "overseers" of the congregation. In this way they would guide, teach, protect, and oversee the local church where they lived. They had no leadership in any other congregation, and there was always a group of these elders (also called presbyters, pastors, shepherds, bishops, or overseers) in the local church, rather than just one (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5).

Without a return to this Bible plan of church government and a restoration of the organization and officers exactly as were found in New Testament congregations, the true church cannot be reproduced today. But wherever men truly want the Bible plan and are willing to forsake the arrangements devised by men, Christ's plan and Christ's way of church government can be effectively reproduced. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (I Cor. 1:25).

WERE THERE DENOMINATIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

When Jesus promised, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18), He certainly planned to build only one. When the Lord added the saved to "the church" (Acts 2:47), only one church was added to. Since Christ purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), and since He loved the church and gave Himself up for "it" (Eph. 5:25), it is quite clear that only one church existed in New Testament times. Never are "kinds" of churches mentioned. Never in the Bible do we read of "different" churches teaching different doctrines.

Today we see hundreds of different denominational churches in competition with one another and even opposing one another. The presence of many denominations in the world today causes many people to think that there must have been sects or denominations in Bible times. But because, on the other hand, they see only one church in the Bible, these people create certain imaginations in their minds to try to find different denominations in the Scriptures.

Some men say that different denominations today are just "branches" of the one

church. But whoever saw a tree with so many different kinds of branches? Where is any tree whose branches fight and destroy one another? What kind of plant could exist producing so many different kinds of fruit? And why do we never read of any “branches” of the church in the Bible?

Other men say that the many denominations are all parts of the “universal” or “invisible” church. But why does the Bible never tell us of such a “church universal” made up of all denominations? Why is the church pictured in the Bible as visible instead of invisible? The apostle Paul was helped on his way to Jerusalem by “the church” (Acts 15:3). Could an invisible church have helped him? And if there were such a thing as a “universal church” made up of all denominations how could its parts be so different and its branches fight one another and produce different fruits? Surely such unreasonable imaginations are not the teaching of the Bible. They are mere excuses of men who try to justify things which are clearly contrary to the Scriptures.

There were no denominations in the Bible. Jesus did not build different kinds of churches. He would not have died to purchase various opposing branches of churches which bring forth differing and confusing fruits. These

conditions have been caused by men, and consequently men have been forced to try to defend them.

DID JESUS ACTUALLY PRAY FOR UNITY AMONG BELIEVERS?

Many people are surprised to learn of the fervent prayer which Jesus prayed shortly before He went to the cross as recorded in John 17: 20, 21: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

Notice these points which the Bible clearly reveals about this prayer of the Savior for unity:

1. Jesus was praying for all believers of all ages, as well as for his apostles. He was praying for you and me who would believe on Him "through their word." Jesus' prayer for unity was for all believers.

2. Jesus uttered this prayer shortly before He died, showing the great concern which He felt about unity among all His followers. One

of His last requests of God before He left His disciples was that they should always be one.

3. The kind of unity which Jesus prayed for was the kind which exists between Himself and God. He asked that all be one "as thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." The pattern for true unity among followers of Christ must be the perfect unity between God and Christ.

4. Jesus prayed for unity so that "the world may believe that thou hast sent me." The world laughs at divided believers. Jesus' prayer shows that the world will not believe in a divided Christianity.

Jesus prayed for unity among all believers of all time. The setting of His prayer showed His deep concern in such unity. He was praying for a type of unity which exists between God and Christ, and He said that unless all believers are one the world would not believe that God had sent Him.

What are you doing about the Lord's prayer for unity? Many are violating this prayer by participating in divisions which cancel the unity which Jesus prayed for. Instead, we must be "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit

in the bond of peace. There is one body (which is the church, Eph. 1:22, 23), and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:3-6).

Let us work and pray for the unity for which Jesus prayed.

IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A DENOMINATION?

The following reasons are given to show that the church of Christ is not a denomination, but rather is altogether unlike the many different denominations in the true sense of the term “denomination.” The church of Christ is not a denomination because:

1. The church of Jesus Christ in the Bible was not a division of anything. Jesus built one church (Matt. 16:18) and prayed that all His followers be one (John 17:21). The Word of Christ condemns division among believers (I Cor. 1:10-13), and every Christian must strive diligently for unity in the one body or church (Eph. 4:3-6). Since a denomination is a division, the Lord’s church is not a denomination because it is not a division, but rather opposes division.

2. Just because men may call the church a division or sect does not make it one. In Acts 24:5 the apostle Paul was called by his enemies a ringleader of a Jewish sect. When Paul defended himself he referred to the church as “the way which they call heresy” (Acts 24:14). But this did not mean that Paul was a member of a heresy or sect. He continued by saying that in the group which was everywhere called a sect he worshipped “the God of my fathers.” This means that the way or group which men were calling a sect was really the way of God and no heresy or sect at all. In like manner the church of Christ today may be everywhere called a denomination, but this does not mean that it is a denomination and calling the church a denomination does not make it one.

3. Since a denomination is a group with a designating name to separate it from other divisions, this becomes another reason why the church is not a denomination. There is no single name for the church in the Bible. It was called by Jesus “my church” (Matt. 16:18), it was most often called simply “the church” (Acts 2:47), it was referred to as “the church of God” (I Cor. 1:2), “the church of the living God” (I Tim. 3:15), and by many other descriptions and names. Congregations of the Lord’s church were called “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16).

The church in a special way did belong to Christ as its builder, purchaser, owner and head. But even the term "churches of Christ" was not the very name or the only name of the church. The Lord's church has no exclusive and division-causing name such as denominations wear.

4. Another important reason that the church is not a denomination is that men and women can be Christians and members of the church of the Lord without being in any denomination. There were no denominations in the Bible. Most of them began 1600 years after Jesus built His church. People were in the Lord's church in Bible times without being in denominations, and the same can be true today. If we believe in only the very same Jesus which they did, and obey nothing other than the Word of God which they did, we will be the same Christians and members of the same church which they were.

To make this point clear to all, let us ask this question: What would you ask me to do to be a member of your denomination? You would surely answer with two requirements: (1) I would have to desire or want to be in such a denomination, and (2) I would have to meet the necessary entrance requirements which would

put me into the denomination. That is, to be in any denomination I would have to seek to be a member, and I would have to qualify to be a member. No denomination would grant membership without meeting these basic requirements. But I do not want to be a member of any denomination. Rather, I desire not to be a member of any denomination. I am not in any denomination because I have not met the simplest requirement of wanting or seeking to be a member. In the second place, I have never done anything which any denomination has asked me to do to qualify as a member. I have met the simple requirements of Jesus to make me a Christian, and He has by these Bible requirements added me to His church. But I have never complied with the entrance requirements of any denominational church, and instead, I have even refused to meet the membership regulations of every denomination.

Now how could anyone say that I am a member of a denomination? I have never wanted to be, and I have refused to take the necessary steps to be, in any and every denomination on earth. And yet I am a member of Jesus' church as were those Christians in the New Testament, because I have done, according to the Bible, what they did in order to be in the church. And what I have done is what every one of you can

do – you can be just a Christian, a member of the Lord's church, without being in any denomination.

Therefore, the church of Christ is not a denomination because: (1) It is not a division, and denominations are divisions. (2) Calling a group a sect or division does not mean that it actually is. (3) The church has no designating and distinctive name, but rather wears all Bible names which every believer could wear. And (4) it is altogether possible for any one to be in the church while refusing to be in any and every denomination. Will you be just a Christian?

IS ALL WORSHIP ACCEPTABLE?

Man is a worshipful being. Sooner or later he bows in reverence – if not before God, then before some kind of idol. But it is not enough just to worship; man must worship the true God in the true way. In Genesis chapter four the first worship recorded in the Bible was of two types: vain and true. The worship performed by Cain was unacceptable, but the worship Abel offered was acceptable to God. In like manner, every worshipping person since the days of Cain and Abel has worshipped either acceptably or unacceptably before God.

The idol worshippers in Athens were practicing ignorant worship (Acts 17:23). They were ignorantly following their own wishes and feelings without considering God's instructions. This type of worship is practiced by pagans who worship idols, but also by educated and learned people as well. The people of Athens were told to repent of their ignorance of God's Word (Acts 17:30).

Worship which is according to catechisms, prayer books, and other doctrines and commandments of men is vain or useless worship. Jesus said, "But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). This is the type of worship which Cain offered. He followed his own opinion as to how to worship, rather than obeying the commandments of God. And even though there are millions of people who have practiced, and are now practicing such worship, Jesus said men's commandments make worship vain.

WHAT MAKES WORSHIP TRUE WORSHIP?

John 4:23, 24 speaks of "true worshippers" who worship God "in spirit and in truth." This passage is very important to this subject of worship because it explains the difference between true worship and false, and determines

whether our worship is pleasing or displeasing to God. Jesus here states that true worship is done "in truth." Since God's Word is truth (John 17:17), this means that worship must exactly follow the Scriptures in order to be true. We must not add to nor subtract from God's Word (Rev. 22:18, 19). We must abide only in the doctrine of Christ (II John 9). True worship comes from obeying God's Word, not from following a mixture of the teachings and opinions of men.

Jesus said also that true worshippers worship "in spirit," which means that our worship comes from our heart or spirit. Worship must not be a ritual or a mere outward pretension. True worship is a sincere yearning after God from the depths of our soul. Without this reverence and devotion all outward forms of worship are meaningless. Worship done "in spirit" is that which is done with all our heart.

You will notice that true worship is "in spirit and in truth." Either element without the other is incomplete. If a religious group worships with great spiritual sincerity and feeling but does not follow the truth, their worship is not true worship. Likewise, if we follow the Scriptural pattern for worship but do not worship "in spirit," our worship is also vain. What

God has joined together, let not man put asunder. God has clearly joined truth and sincerity together to form true worship. Each without the other is void.

HOW DID THE EARLY CHURCH WORSHIP?

We are now ready to answer directly the question, "How did the early church worship?" In Acts chapter two we learn of the beginning of the church. We want to examine carefully the worship of these first Christians so that our worship will be true worship.

The first church continued steadfastly or regularly in the "apostles' doctrine." We today must continue in the same teachings of the apostles by preaching their writings from the New Testament. The Scriptures furnish the Christian completely unto every good work (II Tim. 3:16, 17). But great care must be taken to use the Scriptures only in our worship instead of creeds, catechisms, prayer books, and other doctrines of men.

Next we notice "fellowship" in the first Christian worship, which means "taking part together." Fellowship included free-will giving to finance the work of the church (Acts 2:44, 45; I Cor. 16:1, 2). Such contributions every

first day of the week must be a part of true worship today, instead of assessments, church taxes, and other teachings of men.

Fellowship also included singing. Colossians 3:16 commands the singing of spiritual songs to teach and admonish one another. Ephesians 5:19 requires singing and making melody in the heart in praise to God. No instruments, bells, drums, or dancing were ever practiced in early church worship. Christian praise must be done "decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40).

"Breaking of bread" of communion is next mentioned in the pattern of early church worship (Acts 2:42). Every first day of the week the members remembered Christ's sacrifice by taking bread and fruit of the vine as remembrances of Christ's broken body and shed blood (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 11:23-29). There was no special Sunday for communion, no "communion in one kind," no miracle performed to change the bread into Jesus' literal flesh. All these are changes and additions by men.

"Prayers" were part of true worship in the early church (Acts 2:42). These were meaningful expressions from the heart, not readings of a prayer book, not rituals and chants in Latin. True prayers must be "with the spirit and with the understanding also" (I Cor. 14:15).

Early worship was continuing steadfastly

in spirit and in truth in: (1) the apostles' doctrine (or preaching and teaching the New Testament today), (2) fellowship (including free-will contributions and unaccompanied singing), (3) breaking of bread (or weekly communion), and (4) prayers. Because true worship is simple and meaningful, we plead for a forsaking of men's ways and a returning to God's way. Reproducing the exact manner of early church worship, we can restore true scriptural and acceptable worship today.

WHAT IS THE DAY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP?

Although God commanded Israel to keep the Sabbath or seventh day of the week (Ex. 20: 2, 8), Christians who "rightly divide" the Bible know that we today are under a new and better covenant (Heb. 8:6-13). In the new covenant or New Testament we find a new day. The following are Bible reasons why the first day of the week is the day for Christian worship:

1. Jesus nailed the old commandments to His cross (Col. 2:14), and we now should not allow any one to require the keeping of Sabbath days (Col. 2:16).

2. Jesus was raised upon the first day of the week (Mark 16:9), and the resurrection of Christ is the greatest event in the Gospel (I Cor. 15:17).

3. The church was established on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47), and Pentecost was always the "morrow after the Sabbath" which is Sunday (Lev. 23:15, 16).

4. Communion was practiced in the early church on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). This "breaking of bread" was done "steadfastly" or regularly (Acts 2:42). The communion was practiced on the regular day when the Christians came together (I Cor. 11:18-29).

5. Weekly collections as part of Christian worship were commanded for every first day of the week (I Cor. 16:1, 2) and we never read of contributions or communion on the Sabbath in the early church.

6. The "Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10) was the day of Jesus, just as the "Lord's supper" was His memorial supper (I Cor. 11:20). The special day for Christian worship is Sunday, the first day of the week.

ARE MEN AUTHORIZED TO CHANGE CHRIST'S WILL?

After He arose from the dead, Jesus said, "All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and earth" (Matt. 28:18). In religion, men are to observe all things commanded by Christ (Matt. 28:20). The Bible shows that no man or group of men has the right to change the will of Christ. The apostles taught Christ's will as directed by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). Even they dared not change the facts, commands, ordinances, or promises of the Gospel (Gal. 1:8).

Men, therefore, have no right to change the doctrine of the New Testament. They have no right to establish denominations, or to conduct worship that differs from that revealed in the New Testament.

When people change the will of Christ, they forsake what is given for their own good (II Tim. 3:15-17; James 1:21; II John 9). They instead follow the doctrines and commandments of men. These make worship vain (Matt. 15:9), produce division and confusion, and make men subject to the wrath of God (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:19).

The creeds, confessions, catechisms, and practices of men are without any authority for Christians. Let us have no rule of faith but the

New Testament of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Peter wrote, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (I Pet. 4:11). Therefore, we must do what God commands, and leave undone what He does not command (I Sam. 15:13-23; Acts 5:29).

In doing God's commandments, we may have to exercise opinion at times. Christ says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:15, 16a). We must go, but whether we go by boat, cycle, airplane, motor car, or on foot is left to us, for the method of transportation is a matter of human judgment. We are free to select the method of travel which seems best, for Christ has not limited us to a particular way of travel.

We must preach but we are not left free to preach what opinion dictates. When Christ says, "preach the gospel," He prohibits all other messages.

Christians must state the terms of pardon to those who hear, but the terms of pardon must be those which Christ gave, not those which men have chosen. Sponsorship and sprinkling cannot replace belief and baptism, for the former are men's commandments, the latter those of Him who has "all authority."

When Christ commands, but does not tell how the command is to be carried out, we must use our opinion to seek the best method. When Christ commands, and states the method of carrying out the command, we may not use a different method of our own choosing.

We must do only what Christ commands or authorizes. We must do it by the method Christ specifies. If Christ has not stated the method to be used in obeying the command, we are free to select the method which seems best. In any case, we are to work together in love (I Cor. 13; Phil. 2:14).

WHY DO THOSE WHO CLAIM TO FOLLOW CHRIST WEAR DIFFERENT NAMES?

The many different religious names worn today by those who claim to follow Christ have been chosen because of the influence of leaders or denominations with which people desire to be identified. Many of these men and movements represent a desire to establish a purer form of Christianity than that represented by apostate churches. But none of them can take the place of the one Lord whom Christians serve, or the body, which is His church (Col. 1:18).

Truly great men in the history of Christianity have felt as Martin Luther, who said, “I

pray you to leave my name alone and call not yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified for anyone . . .” (Despite his plea, a well-known denomination wears his name)!

We should wear only the name of Him who was crucified for us. “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (in this name)” (I Pet. 4:16).

CAN ONE BE JUST A CHRISTIAN?

The first Christians were Christians only. They were members of the one church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18), but of no denomination. By being members of the one church, and of no denomination, they respected Christ’s prayer (John 17:20, 21), and the plea of Paul (I Cor. 1:10). They had no part in promoting religious division so common today.

Can we, too, be just Christians, as they were? Must we be members of denominations in order to obey Christ and be saved? Paul, Philip, Aquila, and others heard the Gospel, believed it, repented of sins, confessed Jesus Christ as God’s

Son, and were immersed into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit for the remission of sins (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38). As a result, the Lord added them to His church, the one church (Acts 2:47).

Thousands, perhaps millions, were saved and added to Christ's church long before the oldest denomination was founded. Certainly, therefore, one may be a Christian only, or be a Christian without being a member of any denomination. All such Christians can meet and work together, becoming thus a simple church of Christ like those spoken of and described in the New Testament (Rom. 16:16).

If we obey the Gospel only, we will be Christians only. If we continue in the New Testament doctrine and practice we will be undenominational. And if we do these divine things, avoiding human things in religion, we will please the Father, and Christ the head of the church.

HOW DOES ONE START?

Belief is the starting point of all acceptable service to God, for "without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

In order to be saved, we must first believe in God, and in his Son, J̄esus Christ. Jesus said, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). It is the Gospel which tells of the birth, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and authority of Christ. Therefore we must also believe this message (Mark 16:15, 16).

Christ commanded that the Gospel be preached because He knew that unless men heard it, they could not believe on Him and be saved. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Read also Rom. 10:10-16.

But faith is not a single step to be completed before beginning a second step toward salvation. Instead, faith is the motive and source of all obedience toward God. Everything done in becoming a Christian or in living the Christian life is an outgrowth of faith in God and Christ. Repentance, confession, and baptism are acts of faith. When we perform these steps of obedience we are expressing outwardly our inward faith.

The Gospel is thus the power of God unto salvation for them that "believe" (Rom. 1:16). We add to our "faith" the necessary Christian characteristics (II Pet. 1:5). The Bible says, "We walk by faith" (II Cor. 5:7). Christianity

is so dependent upon faith that it is often spoken of in the Bible as “the faith” (Jude 3).

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

IS REPENTANCE REQUIRED?

Repentance is a change of mind as one plans to change his life. It is a turning away from sin and turning to God. Because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), God has commanded all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). God does not wish any to perish, but it is His will that all should come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9).

Repentance is caused by conviction of sin. When the Gospel of Christ caused the Jews on Pentecost to be “pricked in their hearts,” they were told to “repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:37, 38). Many refuse to repent because they do not admit that they are sinners.

Repentance follows Godly sorrow (II Cor. 7:10). This is sadness, regret, and shame that we are guilty of sin. “Godly sorrow worketh repentance.”

Repentance is produced by the fear of

punishment which must come for sin. Jesus said, "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). This is Godly fear which brings about a Godly change.

Repentance is brought about by remembering God's goodness. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom. 2:4). When the prodigal son thought of the goodness of his father, he "came to himself" and decided to return to his home (Luke 15:17, 18).

Reformation of life follows true repentance. John the Baptist commanded, "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). A thief must cease to steal, a liar must stop lying, and a polygamist must forsake polygamy. Unless a change is seen in one's life, repentance has not truly come.

WHAT KIND OF CONFESSION DOES CHRIST REQUIRE?

About nineteen hundred years ago two men were riding along discussing a certain passage of Scripture. One of the men was a Christian, and the other was a man from Ethiopia who had been to Jerusalem for Jewish worship. As they reasoned together the Ethiopian wanted to be baptized and asked the Christian what would

hinder him. The preacher told him if he really believed, he could. Then the man made the grand confession which must precede baptism. He said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37).

Paul tells everyone what part confession plays in salvation when he says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9, 10). Christ tells us why confession is important when He says, "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32).

A simple confession of one's faith in Jesus as the Son of God is a necessary step in conversion to Christ. A person then lives a life which is a daily confession of his faith that Jesus is truly God's Son.

IS BAPTISM REALLY IMPORTANT?

Baptism is important because it is commanded by Christ: "Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them" (Matt. 28:19). The

apostle Peter commanded the Jews who asked what to do, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:37, 38). Baptism is in the name of Christ because it is by His authority.

Baptism is important because it is done "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Anything done under this charge must be a serious matter.

Baptism is important because it brings one into contact with the death and blood of Christ. The apostle Paul said that those who are baptized are baptized into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3). Since the blood was shed in the death of Jesus, we contact the saving blood of Christ in baptism.

Baptism is important because it is the final step of becoming a Christian, and it puts us into Christ. The Bible says, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). Salvation is found only "in Christ" (II Tim. 2:10). This makes baptism "into Christ" important.

Baptism is important because it is necessary for salvation. It is for "remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). It is in order to be "saved" (Mark 16:16; I Pet. 3:21). It is "to wash away" our sins (Acts 22:16).

The fact that baptism is important does

not mean that other steps in salvation are unimportant. When speaking of believing and being baptized Jesus said, "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). This shows that what goes before baptism is as essential as baptism, and likewise what follows baptism is important. Every command of God is important.

IS IT NECESSARY THAT I BE BAPTIZED FOR THE RIGHT PURPOSE?

There is a definite reason for every commandment of Christ. Unless we obey for the proper purpose, our obedience is not acceptable. The commandment to remember Christ in communion must be done for the correct purpose, or else we eat and drink "damnation" to our souls (I Cor. 11:27, 29). The same is true of baptism. It must be done for the purpose which Christ intended in order to bring salvation instead of damnation.

Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Many denominations teach, "He that believeth is saved and is then baptized." This reverses the purpose of baptism.

We are warned in the Word of God that some preach a different and changed Gospel.

Some preachers “pervert the Gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:7). But notice the warning: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).

Christ’s purpose for baptism is clear. Let not man corrupt the purpose of the Lord’s commandment. Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

WHAT IS BAPTISM? IS IT IMMERSION, SPRINKLING, OR POURING?

Just as the purpose for baptism is important, so likewise is the method. Just as men’s catechisms and doctrines have corrupted one, they have also corrupted the other in the religious world. Men have substituted sprinkling, pouring, and other changes for the Bible way of baptizing.

“And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water” (Matt. 3:16). Jesus’ baptism took Him down into the water, because afterward He came up “out of the water.” John, who baptized Christ, was baptizing “in Jordan” (Mark 1:9). He was baptizing in the Jordan River in Aenon near Salim “because there was much water there” (John 3:23).

The Eunuch from Ethiopia was baptized

by Philip in this manner: “And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip” (Acts 8:38, 39). His baptism required a going down into the water and coming up out of the water.

The Bible twice says we are “buried” with Christ by baptism (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). After dying to sin we are buried in a watery grave with Christ. This is an imitation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 6:3, 4). When we die we will not want someone to sprinkle dirt upon our heads. A burial is putting away a person under that which he is buried in. So is baptism an immersion in water as God’s words direct.

But someone may ask, “Is there more than one way to baptize scripturally?” The answer is Eph. 4:5: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Men have several methods of baptism, but God has only one.

WHO MAY BE BAPTIZED?

The doctrines of men say that infants may be baptized, or that those who pass examinations or pay class fees are proper candidates for

baptism. What does the Bible teach about who may be baptized?

1. Those that gladly received the Word of God were baptized (Acts 2:41).

2. Jesus said believers were to be baptized (Mark 16:16).

3. Peter told people first to repent and then be baptized (Acts 2:38).

4. Philip required belief and a confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Acts 8:36, 37).

Bible baptism was for those who had been taught the Gospel (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15, 16). “Men and women” (not infants) who gladly received the Word of God were baptized (Acts 2:41; 8:12). These were believers in Jesus who confessed that He was the Son of God. They had repented of sin and turned to God in true faith and full obedience.

Never were infants baptized in the Bible. Infants do not need baptism, for they are not in sin. Jesus said that they are examples in life to older ones (Matt. 18:3). “Of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). Sons do not bear the sins of their fathers (Ezek. 18:20).

DOES IT MATTER WHO BAPTIZES ME?

“A certain disciple” baptized Paul (Acts 9:10, 18). The Bible says nothing about special men in the church ordained to baptize. Baptism is by the authority of Christ and not by the authority of the church (Matt. 28:18-20). If you are separated from any Gospel preacher and yet understand the Lord’s commandment, you should understand the matter of who does the baptizing is not important. If the proper Bible teachings are in a man’s heart, he can be baptized by anyone who will assist him. But he should be careful not to allow some preacher to turn him away from the Bible teachings or to baptize him into some denominational church. When you have been scripturally baptized the Lord adds you to His church (Acts 2:41, 47). You can then worship regularly and scripturally until you can teach others the truth so that they, too, may be added to the church. Nowhere in the Bible do we ever read of “joining the church.” Bible baptism adds an honest soul to the Lord’s church.

ARE WE SAVED BY GRACE OR WORKS?

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Paul does not say that man has nothing to do to be saved. He teaches instead that even when man has obeyed God's commands, he is still saved by grace, for man cannot do anything of which he may rightly boast (Luke 17:10).

One cannot be saved by the works of the flesh, for the end of all who do them is spiritual death (Gal. 5:19-21). One cannot be saved by man-made religion, for such produces vain worship (Matt. 15:9).

But even when one obeys the Gospel of Christ, he is saved by grace. This is true because (1) grace drew the plan for man's redemption, (2) grace gave the sacrifice for man's sin by Christ's death on the cross, (3) grace caused the terms of pardon to be announced to all nations through Gospel preaching. Everything that man does to be saved is done because divine grace makes it possible for man to accept, believe, and obey.

When a man believes, he believes because God sent a faith-producing message (Mark 16: 15, 16; Rom. 10:10-17) to a creature to whom God gave the power to think and believe.

If a man comes to repentance, it is only because God's goodness led him to do so (Rom. 2:4).

Peter was able to confess “thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” only because Christ’s heavenly Father revealed that truth to Peter (Matt. 16:17). Men today make the same confession, not by their own wisdom, but because God’s word has taught them that Jesus is the Christ.

As for baptism, this is not something of which the person receiving it may boast. The physical work is done by the baptizer, not the baptized. And the spiritual work is done by God (Titus 3:5-7).

Even when we consider good works, boasting is excluded, “for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained (prepared) that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

God has commanded those who desire salvation to believe, repent, confess Christ, be baptized, and live a life of faith given to good works. Clearly, there is something for man to do!

But it is just as certain that when man has done all, he is still saved by grace, the unmerited or undeserved favor of God. A man’s salvation is begun, worked out, and consummated by the grace of God, even though man’s activity is required.

Therefore, Christ does not say that we may earn our salvation so that it becomes a

matter of wages paid. Instead He says, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

HOW DO I ENTER THE FAMILY OF GOD?

God’s family or house is the church. The Bible speaks of “the house of God, which is the church of the living God” (I Tim. 3:15). Christians are called “the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10) and “the household of God” (Eph. 2:19).

The only way to become members of God’s family (the church) is to become His children. The only way to become God’s children is to be born again. Jesus said, “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

We are begotten by the Spirit when the Spirit is planted in our hearts. The Word of God is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11). When God’s word is planted in our hearts we are begotten of the Spirit (I Pet. 1:22, 23). We are begotten by the word of truth (James 1:18) when we receive the implanted word which is able to save our souls (James 1:21). Paul said Christians are “begotten” through the Gospel (I Cor. 4:15).

To be “born of water” we must “come forth” from the water. Every time a birth is

mentioned in the Bible, it is a “coming forth” to a new existence. Jesus was born from the dead (Col. 1:18) when He came forth from the dead. John was born of woman (Matt. 11:11) when he came forth to a new existence.

We “come forth” from water when we are baptized (Rom. 6:3, 4). We come forth from the grave of water to “walk in newness of life.” This is the new birth by which we begin a new existence as God’s children.

We are begotten of the Spirit by believing the Gospel which is planted in our heart by the word of God. We then obey the truth by being baptized to be born of water. The Bible says, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26, 27).

This is the process by which we are saved (Mark 16:16). It is the process by which God adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Becoming a child of God makes one a member of the church, for the church is God’s family, made up of His children.

HAVE THERE BEEN UNDENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIANS IN ALL AGES?

Jesus said that the Word of God is the

“seed of the kingdom” (Luke 8:11). The same seed will always bring forth the same kind of plant. Wherever and whenever the seed is sown it produces after its kind. This is one of God’s unchangeable laws.

God’s Word was preached by Christ and His apostles. That produced Christians who were not members of any denomination. They were all one in the great family of God, the church which Christ established.

If the same seed, the Word of God, is preached today it will likewise produce simple Christians. This has been true in every age and in every land where the pure seed has been sown. There have therefore been un-denominational Christians in every age.

God promised that his Word would not return unto Him “void” but would accomplish the thing for which it was sent (Isa. 55:11). When Jesus promised to build His church, He promised that “the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18, 19). This church (or kingdom) would “never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:44).

The Bible says that glory will be given to God in the church “throughout all ages” (Eph. 3:21). Wherever Christ’s word has gone, Christ’s church has gone. Whenever the pure undenominational seed has been planted, the undenominational church has been produced. The seed of

God's Word produces after its kind.

CAN I PLANT THE CHURCH IN MY OWN HOME?

Several times in the New Testament we read of the church in the houses of different people. Paul saluted the church which was in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3-5). A church was meeting in the house of Archippus (Philemon 2). The same can be true today.

If you are removed from any group of Christians who are working and worshipping after the New Testament order, you should begin a church in your own home. Jesus said that where two or three are gathered together in His name that He is in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20). Wherever a Christian goes he can plant a congregation of the Lord's church with nothing more than an open Bible and a faithful life. If we will plant and water the seed, God will give the increase (I Cor. 3:6).

WHAT HAPPENS IF I SIN AFTER BECOMING A CHRISTIAN?

1. I will be lost if I don't repent: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the

world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb. The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (II Pet. 2:20-22).

2. I must repent and pray: "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22).

3. God has promised to forgive: "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

4. As a Christian I have great help in overcoming my sinfulness: Jesus is my advocate with the Father (I John 2:1). He is my mediator between God and me (I Tim. 2:5). Christ is an understanding high priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities because he was tempted in all points as we are and

was yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear, but will with each temptation provide a way of escape (I Cor. 10:13). The Holy Spirit helps our infirmities and makes intercessions for us (Rom. 8:26, 27). Faithful Christian brethren can also pray to God for me (James 5:16).

“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (I John 1:7).

DO CHRISTIANS REALLY HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH CHRIST?

Jesus promised, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). The Bible says that the lives of those who are dead to the world are “hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). Christ dwells in our heart by faith (Eph. 3:17). We have peace with God through him (Rom. 5:1). He said, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20).

Christians have vital fellowship with God through Christ. There is not a moment of the day or night when He is not watching over us.

The eyes that watch over us do not slumber nor sleep. Our problems are of interest to Him, as well as our pleasures. We never walk alone when we belong to Him. We cannot wander from His presence.

A Christian also enjoys the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:1). John said, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (I John 1:3, 4).

The fellowship which Christians have with God through Christ is worth more than every type of fellowship which the world offers. We are taught to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). But to be able to have close association and constant communion with the God of all the universe is a marvelous Christian blessing.

DOES GOD REALLY ANSWER THE PRAYER OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN?

Jesus said, "Ask and it shall be given you" (Matt. 7:7). He promised, "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21:22). He said, "If ye then being

evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him” (Matt. 7:11). The Bible gives many clear and definite assurances that God answers the prayer of a Christian.

The basis of acceptable prayer is that we abide in Christ and His words abide in us. He says that if this is true, we may ask what we will and “it shall be done” unto us (John 15:7). We are encouraged to pray for wisdom, but such a prayer must be “in faith, nothing wavering,” for the double-minded man shall not receive anything of the Lord (James 1:5-8).

James says that our prayers must not be selfish: “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3). The Psalmist said, “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Psalm 37:4).

A famous poet truthfully said, “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.” The Christian life is a life of daily prayer. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). God really does answer the prayer of a true Christian.

IS THERE A REAL HEAVEN?

If there were no real heaven, could Jesus

have said, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3)? Heaven is a "place" where Jesus went (Acts 1:9-11). From heaven He will return to gather the faithful to ever be with Him (I Thess. 4:16, 17). Those who deny that heaven is a place prepared for every true Christian deny the Word of God.

Heaven is the great goal of every child of God. Our reward is in heaven (Matt. 5:12). There we have waiting "a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Cor. 5:1). The inheritance which God has reserved for every faithful son is in heaven (I Pet. 1:4). It is a real place.

Heaven will be a far greater reward than all our labors and trials could deserve. The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18). The Bible gives us "exceeding great and precious promises" of things to come hereafter (II Pet. 1:4).

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. It is man's greatest goal to gain and his greatest loss to lose.

IS HELL REAL, TOO?

God, the all-wise Creator, rewards the Christian for his faith and for his deeds. Will He not also punish the wicked for his unbelief and his disobedience? Jesus said that the unprepared of earth “shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:46).

He warned that we must fear God who “is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). Hell is described as a place of continual burning with fire and brimstone into which there will be those cast alive (Rev. 20: 10, 15; 19:20). There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 13:42). It is called a place of outer darkness (Matt. 25:30).

Hell is to be inhabited by creatures too horrible to imagine: the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41), hypocrites (Matt. 24:51), and the fearful, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars of all ages (Rev. 21:8).

These descriptions show that the punishment of the wicked is terrible, conscious torment, suffering, and sorrow forever and ever. This endless, hopeless pain is the just payment for sin and false teaching. Purgatory is shown by Jesus to be impossible (Luke 16:26). There is no second

chance nor hope of any change after a soul leaves this earth.

No wonder that Jesus said, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

HOW WILL I BE JUDGED ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT?

You are going to face God in judgment. There is no way to escape it (Heb. 9:27). The day of judgment is coming, and you are going to be there. "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God" where "each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:10, 12).

You are going to hear Christ say either "Come" or "Depart" (Matt. 25:34, 41). With these words you will be assigned to your eternal destiny (Matt. 25:46). How will you be judged?

You will be judged by the Word of Christ. Jesus said, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). This is why we must obey the words of Christ. We shall be accepted or rejected according to the words of the New Testament.

You will be judged for your deeds. "For

we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). When the books are opened, the dead shall be judged out of them according to their works (Rev. 20:12).

You will be judged for your words: "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:36, 37).

You will be judged for your thoughts: "For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil" (Eccl. 12:14).

Are you ready for the revealing, righteous judgment of God?

DOES GOD'S PROVIDENCE GUIDE HIS CHILDREN?

There are many assurances in the Bible that God does promise to be with and guide His children. Christ gives to His followers the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). He assures us that

if we put God's kingdom first He will provide for us our physical needs (Matt. 6:33). And we have the assurance of Paul that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

While these and other Scriptures indicate God does providentially guide His children, we realize that everything He does is in harmony with His natural laws around us. When the perfect written Word of God was completed, God said miracles would cease (I Cor. 13:8-10). We therefore do not expect God's guidance by a miracle, sign, or vision.

Furthermore, divine providence does not do away with man's freedom of choice and will. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:6). We join with the Psalmist of old in our expressions of faith and trust when he said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want . . . he leadeth me beside the still waters . . . he leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Psa. 23).

IS IT POSSIBLE TO REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS?

A true Christian is happy. He can "rejoice

in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4). Christ is the source of his joy. Paul said, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Because a Christian has the protection, care, and love of Christ, he has no reason for fear, doubt, or sadness.

A Christian will not always have earthly things to make him happy. He will be persecuted and will have to suffer. But his spiritual hope and peace will comfort and sustain him in every kind of hardship and trouble.

“All things” work together for his good (Rom. 8:28). This includes even poverty, sickness, losses, and all experiences of life. Sorrow and disappointment may come, but the faith of a child of God will overcome all things.

Worldly people may have some joy and brief pleasure in sin, but the Bible shows that sin’s pleasures are for but “a season” (Heb. 11:25). A Christian is not just happy on the surface. He has deep joy within his heart which cannot be shaken or overcome.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.”

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS SHOULD I ADD AS A CHRISTIAN?

Growth is necessary for all living things. In

a Christian's life if there is no growth there will soon be spiritual death. Since becoming a Christian is called being "born again" (John 3:3), the new child of God must grow spiritually.

The apostle Peter began very weak and even denied Christ three times, but later he grew spiritually to become very strong and steady. He knew the importance of growing in Christ. Peter teaches, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Pet. 2:2). Also at the end of his writings he says, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 3:18).

Peter describes Christian growth as follows: "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be

ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 1:5-11). These are the ways we grow in Christ. Without these characteristics we will fall and will not enter the everlasting kingdom.

WHAT CAUSES CHRISTIAN GROWTH?

Christian growth is produced in a similar way to physical growth. There are certain necessary requirements for either type of growth. In these necessary elements, therefore, the growth of a child of God is like the growth of an ordinary child.

1. A Christian must keep his life from spiritual disease which is sin. We must lay aside impurities of character which hinder growth (I Pet. 2:1, 2; Heb. 12:1). We must avoid evil companionships which corrupt our manner of life (I Cor. 15:33; II Cor. 6:14-17).

2. A child of God must have proper food in order to grow. The Word of God is like milk to a new baby (I Pet. 2:1). It is able to build us up (Acts 20:32). We receive this good food by studying the Bible (II Tim. 2:15) and

worshipping regularly (Heb. 10:25). Because the members at Corinth had neglected and abused the Lord's Supper, many were weak, sickly, and asleep spiritually (I Cor. 11:30).

3. Spiritual exercise is important to Christian growth (Heb. 5:12-14). Such exercise comes from living the Word of God as well as learning it (James 1:22). By actively working and teaching as a Christian we develop our spiritual ability (I Tim. 4:7, 8).

Though our outward man may be growing old and less useful, yet our inward man can be renewed day by day (II Cor. 4:16). The things necessary for spiritual growth must be practiced daily and continued faithfully. Let us keep ourselves away from the disease of sin, let us partake of the food which comes from God's Word and true worship, and let us exercise ourselves unto godliness. Spiritual growth will be the result.

WHEN DOES GOD WANT ME TO START OBEYING HIS GOSPEL?

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation” (II Cor. 6:2).

“Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not

your hearts” (Heb. 3:7, 8).

“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14).

If you know what God wants you to do, hurry to do it. Delay in obeying the Gospel is dangerous and sinful. In one second of time life can cease and all man’s hopes fall into the grave. “What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).

The Bible examples of conversion show us that no time was wasted in obeying God. Three thousand souls obeyed the Gospel “the same day” after they had heard it for the first time (Acts 2:41). The Ethiopian eunuch stopped his chariot to be baptized after hearing one sermon about Christ (Acts 8:38). The Philippian jailer was baptized “the same hour of the night” (Acts 16:33) after midnight, (vs. 25). Saul of Tarsus was told, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). There is no example in the New Testament of postponing one’s baptism.

When you have come to a knowledge of the truth, delay is a fearful thing (Heb. 10:31). A person should never rush into baptism without proper understanding, but after the simple

Gospel commandments are received, let no man wait to obey. The Lord might say, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:20).

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A REAL CHRISTIAN?

A Christian is one who has first become a Christian and who is then living a Christ-like life. To become a Christian without living the Christian life is hypocrisy. Likewise, to try to live the Christian life without having been born again of water and Spirit is to fail to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5).

A real Christian is one who has died to sin, been buried with Christ in baptism, and has arisen to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:1-4). In Christ he is a new creature. Old things have passed away, and all things have become new (II Cor. 5:17). To him "Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11).

A Christian does not look at others around him to judge how a Christian should live. He looks only at Christ. He will see many pretending Christians and many false Christians. But he knows that God will judge each man by

Christ. The only life he can fully answer for his own. He tries to imitate Jesus.

A Christian is faithful until death (Rev. 2:10). He does not begin the Christian life and later quit. He is “steadfast unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (I Cor. 15:58). His life is steady and unshakeable. He abides in Christ and bears much fruit (John 15:1-8).

A real Christian is a follower of Christ. He suffers for Christ because he follows in the steps of Jesus (I Pet. 2:21). He will suffer persecution even as Christ did (II Tim. 3:12). Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Are you a real Christian? If not, won't you become a Christian and then live faithfully the Christian life?

A REAL CHRISTIAN IS AN ACTIVE, ZEALOUS MEMBER OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The Bible teaches that Christians are the church. Those who were saved by becoming Christians were added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). Christ is the Savior of the

body which is His church (Eph. 5:23; 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18, 24). The Lord's church in any location is made up of the Christians in that location who worship and work together as the body of Christ or as the family of God.

A Christian's relationship in the church is that of a living, active member. Just as the parts of a physical body all work together, so must the members of Christ's spiritual body, the church. Paul explains that we grow up unto Christ, the head, in all things, "from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:15, 16).

Every church member is important, even as every member of a human body is important and useful. Each Christian has his part to play. This causes the church members to grow together in love and usefulness (I Cor. 12:12-27).

God's people are a people who are "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). Each member is "ready unto every good work" (Titus 3:1). Their love is shown by active obedience and service in the church of the Lord.

CHRIST-LIKE IN EVERYTHING

A true Christian is truly Christ-like in all

his actions, words, and thoughts. He denies himself and suffers like Jesus (Luke 9:23). He strives to have the spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9). He develops the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5-9). He tries to yield every thought into captivity to the Lord (II Cor. 10:5).

Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). This kind of life is a Christ-like life.

Christ shines forth from a true Christian's life. It is really Christ living within. When Christ lives in a Christian, the person has the happiness, peace, and comfort which only Christ can bring. This life will attract others to want to be a Christian.

You have now concluded this booklet entitled *You Can Be Just A Christian*. If this study has caused you to want to become just a Christian, and to be just a Christian, its purpose has been fulfilled. The Bible only makes Christians only. We plead with you to forsake sin and error and follow Christ, and Christ only, in everything.

There is no other privilege on earth like being a Christian. There is nothing on earth that can prevent it if you really want to be a true Christian. You can be just a Christian!