

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

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Are There Christians Among The Denominations?

In the book of Acts, the inspired historian records that, “*the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch*” (Acts 11:26). Therefore, the name “Christian” refers to a disciple of Christ who has been forgiven of his sins and brought into a peaceful relationship with God. It is obvious from the context of Acts 11:26 that a Christian is one who is a faithful member of the Lord’s church in a given location. From time to time, the question of whether or not there are faithful Christians among the various denominations is brought before us. This question is nothing new, for in 1837 Alexander Campbell wrote:

I observe that if there be no Christians in the Protestant sects, there are certainly none among the Romanists, none among the Jews, Turks, Pagans; and therefore no Christians in the world except ourselves, or such of us as keep, or strive to keep, all the commandments of Jesus. Therefore, for many centuries there has been no church of Christ, no Christians in the world; and the promises concerning the everlasting kingdom of Messiah have failed, and the gates of hell have prevailed against his church! This cannot be; and therefore there are Christians among the sects (Millennial Harbinger 411 [1837]).

We are living in a time in which those who advocate tolerance and acceptance of diverse and contradictory religious views are

considered noble. Since religious tolerance and acceptance is currently looked upon with such favor, the most popular answer to the question under consideration would certainly be the same answer as that given by Campbell.

However, it is important that we base our views upon the word of God, rather than on the popular opinions of men. When pondering the answer to this important question, we need to consider:

Jesus In Relation To Denominations

1. Jesus did not die for any denominations. Prior to his death and resurrection, Jesus made the statement, “*I will build my church*” (Matthew 16:18). The Lord’s church was brought into existence on the Day of Pentecost following his resurrection (Acts 2:47). Paul assures us that, “*Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*” (Ephesians 5:25). Paul also encouraged the Ephesian elders to, “*to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood*” (Acts 20:28). The Scriptures clearly establish the fact that Christ gave his own life and blood to purchase his church. Since there were no denominations in existence in the first century A.D., we can be sure that Christ did not give his life for any of them.

2. Denominationalism is against Scripture. The very spirit of denominationalism is one of division and sectarianism. In direct opposition to this, Jesus prayed for his followers, “*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*” (John 17:21). The apostle Paul condemned the spirit of denominationalism in the church at Corinth by writing, “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

What Is Required In Becoming A Christian

1. The New Testament clearly states what one must do in order to become a Christian. In speaking to the saints at Rome concerning their conversion to Christianity, Paul writes, “*But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness*” (Romans

6:17-18). Obviously, men are expected to obey the gospel message in order to become Christians. Jesus said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16).

2. Denominations teach error on this subject. Many denominational groups teach that one is made a Christian and is saved by faith in Christ alone. On the other hand, James says that man is justified, *“not by faith only”* (James 2:24). Some groups have replaced true baptism, which is immersion in water, with sprinkling. Others have neglected the need for true repentance in conversion (Acts 2:38). It doesn't take long to realize that what the Bible requires of individuals to become Christians is a far cry from what is required by the creeds of denominationalism.

What It Means To Be A Christian

1. The term “Christian” literally means, “Christ-like.” Those who would properly wear the name “Christian” must be of the disposition to live as Jesus lived. This is most clearly defined by Jesus’ attitude toward the will of the Father. In regard to this, Jesus said, *“I do always those things that please him”* (John 8:29). In other words, those who claim to be Christians must be disposed to always do those things that are pleasing to God.

2. Denominations prevent individuals from living like Christians in the true sense. In various forms and in various ways, denominations teach and practice error with regard to salvation, sin, and the work and worship of the church. To many denominations, the Bible is regarded as an outdated antique that has been replaced by human opinion. Little regard is given to the authority of God’s word, and little effort is made toward truly doing those things that please the Father. As a result, it is impossible for those who are involved in such groups to truly live as Christians (2 John 9).

Conclusion

While it is possible for a person to truly obey the gospel in a denominational setting, such would surely be the exception to the rule. If we wear the name of Christ, then we are expected to obey Christ. *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate,” saith the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 6:17).

✍ David Dann

"In Christ"

The phrase "in Christ" appears many times in the New Testament. In Ephesians 1:3 Paul informs us that **all** spiritual blessings are in Christ. Included in these are redemption, the forgiveness of our sins and that inheritance promised to those in Christ (Ephesians 1:7-11). It takes little effort, then, to conclude that if one desires these blessings he must be "in Christ."

Paul further describes the blessing of being in Christ to the Corinthians as he declares, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

With such declarations of the wonderful blessing to be had "in Christ" you would think that every person who makes a claim of believing in Christ would put forth every effort to learn how one could enter this relationship that Paul describes as being "in Christ" and then do it and encourage everyone else to do likewise. However, this is not the case. Paul said we are baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). What is so hard to understand about these simple statements? Yet the majority of the religious groups in this country who profess faith in Christ deny the necessity of one being baptized. If baptism is unnecessary then it is unnecessary to be "in Christ" as this is the only way taught in the scriptures for one to enter that relationship. Are you "in Christ?" (JH)

Belleville church of Christ

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Schedule of Services

Sun. Bible Study... 9:30 a.m.
Sun. Morning Worship... 10:30 a.m.
Sun. Evening Worship... 5:00 p.m.
Wed. Bible Study... 7:00 p.m.

Elders

Charles Carpenter... (317) 839-3873
James Hahn... (317) 745-1507

Deacons

Leon Nevins... (317) 272-2966
Don Perry... (765) 676-5825
Alvin Stanley... (317) 831-3514

Evangelist

James Hahn... (317) 745-1507