

Why do members of the churches of Christ choose to simply wear the name "Christian," and only the name "Christian?"

Much confusion is evident in the religious world today, moreso even in our day and age than possibly in any other time in history. "God is not the author of confusion," (1 Cor. 14:33), and so we must attribute the religious confusion that does exist today to that of mere man. The answer to the question posed is one that many may not see as being that important. In fact, we often here in the religious world, "What is in a name!" Let us look into the pages of the inspired Word of God and see the biblical importance that is placed upon that of a "name."

Old Testament Significance of Names - When we look back into the pages of the Old Testament (O.T.), we can see the biblical importance that God placed upon "names." Most all are familiar with the creation account in the first few chapters of the book of **Genesis**. In **Gen. 1:3** we see that God created light on the first day of creation. In **Gen. 1:4** we learn that God "divided the light from the darkness" and, in **verse 5**, we see that God gave a "name" to the light He had created, calling it "Day," and to the darkness He gave the "name" "Night." As God continued the creation we can see that He continued to "name" the various aspects of that creation, showing us the significance of a "name." As we continue looking at these first days of beginning we notice in **Gen. 2:19,20** that the first man, whom God named "Adam," was given the responsibility of "naming" every living creature, showing us further evidence of the significance in a "name." Later, in such Scriptures as **Gen. 32:28, 35:10; 1 Kings 18:31; and 2 Kings 17:34**, we see that God gave His servant Jacob the name "Israel" and his descendants were called "Israelites." The Hebrew name "Israel" literally

means "he will rule as God." As we continue reading in the O.T. and see the various ups and downs of God's chosen people, when we reach the pages of the book of **Isaiah** the prophet, we see a foretelling of a day when God's chosen people would include both Jew and Gentile (**Isa. 11:10; 42:6; 49:6; 60:3; 62:2**), and their old name of "Israelites" would be replaced "by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name," (**Isa. 62:2**). Earlier, in **Isa. 56:5** we learn that this "new name" would be "a name better than that of sons and daughters," "an everlasting name that shall not be cut off."

New Testament Significance of Names - As we leave the O.T. and enter the New Testament (N.T.), the Bible student will find the O.T. prophesies being fulfilled. Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, would enter the world by the miraculous birth of a virgin (**Isa. 7:14**), and soon thereafter would begin His earthly ministry of teaching and preaching the will of His Father. We see from various N.T. Scriptures that those who followed after Jesus Christ and His teaching were called by various titles of distinction. They were simply called "disciples" (**Matt. 5:1; Luke 5:30**), "believers" (**Acts 5:14**), "brethren" (**Acts 9:30**), and "saints" (**Acts 9:32**). But, as we have already noticed from various O.T. prophesies, the followers of Jesus Christ and His teaching would now include both Jew and Gentile and no longer would God's chosen people wear the name they once wore. That name would be replaced "by a new name," one that came from the very "mouth of the Lord," and that name would be "an everlasting name," (**Isa. 56:5; 62:2**).

God's New Chosen People - As we continue reading in the N.T., we begin to see the prophesies of Isaiah concerning the inclusion of both Jew and Gentile people into God's family coming true. In the book of **Acts**, which is the

history book of the early church, we see the first Jewish converts on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in **Acts chapter 2**. The apostles were gathered together on that same day in the city of Jerusalem as they had been instructed by Jesus Christ (**Luke 24:49**). As Peter and the other apostles preached the first recorded gospel sermon, we notice from **Acts 2:5** that their audience consisted of "Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven." As Peter continued to tell these devout Jews how they were responsible for the murder of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, his message "pricked" their hearts (**Acts 2:37, KJV**). These convicted Jews then asked Peter and the rest of the apostles a most important question - "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" We find Peter's answer to their question in the very next verse, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," (**Acts 2:38**). In **verse 41** we read, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." From these verses we see some of the first Jewish converts added to Christ's Church (**Acts 2:47**) which would soon consist of all of God's new chosen people. It would be some 10 years later before we would see the first Gentile converts.

As we continue reading about the history of the early church in the book of **Acts**, we see the apostle Peter again involved in doing God's work. This time his audience would be a "devout man," (**Acts 10:2**), but this man was not a Jew. He was a Gentile, specifically "a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment," (**Acts 10:1**). As we continue reading **Acts chapter 10**, we see that Peter eventually makes his way to Cornelius's house and he shares the gospel message with his household. At the end of this chapter, **verse 48**,

we read, **"And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days."** This event would fulfill the O.T. prophesies we have already noticed in bringing both Jew and Gentile together into one family, God's new chosen people.

What Name Would God's New Chosen People Wear? - As we go a bit further into the N.T. book of **Acts**, specifically **chapter 11**, we notice that Barnabus has made his way to Antioch, a Roman province of Syria. He was sent there by the church in Jerusalem which had heard that **"a great number believed and turned to the Lord," (Acts 11:21)** there in Antioch. From **Acts 11:19** we know that a congregation of the Lord's church already existed in Antioch before Barnabus arrived there due to **"those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen."** When Barnabus made it to Antioch and witnessed these things for himself, **verse 25** tells us that he **"departed for Tarsus to seek Saul."** **Notice verse 26 quite closely**, for it tells us that **"when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."**

The name **"Christian"** only appears in the Bible a total of (3) three times, all of which occur in the N.T. In **Acts 26:28**, after the apostle Paul had shared the gospel with King Agrippa we read, **"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian.'**" The apostle Peter would later write, **"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter," (1 Pet. 4:16).** The third occurrence is that of **Acts 11:26** that we have already mentioned. The name **"Christian"** comes from the Greek word **"christianos"** and means **"a**

follower of Christ." Some have said that the name **"Christian"** was a name of derision, one given to the disciples of Christ by their enemies as a means of ridicule, but this is simply not so. As we have already noticed, this **"new name"** that both Jew and Gentile disciples of Christ would wear was one that would be given to them by God. In fact, in **Acts 11:26**, the term translated **"were called"** comes from the Greek word **"chrematizo,"** which scholars tell us has the force of **divine command.** In other words, the disciples at Antioch **"were called Christians" by Almighty God!** That this is true can be seen from the fact that the same Greek word is used (8) other times in the N.T. (**Matt. 2:12, 22; Luke 2:26; Acts 10:22; Rom. 7:3; Heb. 8:5, 11:7, and 12:25**). In each of these verses the word has reference to a **divine utterance.** When we have obeyed the gospel of our Lord and Savior by having **repented of our past sins (Luke 13:3), confessed our belief in Jesus as the Christ (Rom. 10:9,10), and been baptized for the remission of our past sins (Acts 2:38),** let us be willing to wear **the name "Christian,"** and **only the name "Christian,"** and live faithfully to Him Whose name we wear until our earthly life has ended (**Rev. 2:10**).

The End

All Scripture quotations taken from the New King James Version of The Holy Bible unless otherwise noted.

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What Name Should The Followers of Christ Wear?



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