

Where the "Christian" Name Came From and Why.

No other word in the English language carries as much baggage as this one. It's a loaded label, to be sure, but what's interesting is that Jesus never actually gave this name or label to His followers. The early Church never called themselves Christians. It is revealed in a book called the bible, the title most often used for each other was "saints. The Saints walked in His name and knew who they were, the Israel Of God.

The Greek word for saints is ha-gios which means consecrated to God, holy, sacred. It is always used in the plural, Saints. This reflects not just the individual but the connection to a group of people perfectly set apart for Our Lord and His Kingdom.

Beginning with Adam's first task of naming the animals, throughout human history and even today, the creation of a new name or title is significant. A name is embedded with deep meaning drawn from experiences that help define reality in the language we can understand.

The early church was called "Christians by the self-appointed temple powers-that-be for the first time in Antioch. It wasn't a name Jesus' disciples gave themselves or anyone else, it was a name given to them by the ungodly society in Antioch. Those who ran the local temples could call the people into there gathering places for a time to learn and worship, therefore satan could contain this movement by placing a requirement of service. The setting up of physical idols were placed all over this movement and they are everywhere this movement is manifested this day. But why a new name for this group of Christ-followers? Why, from the perspective of all the outsiders, they were simply herded and lumped in with all the other variants of the Jewish and Pagan faiths?

An understanding of the cultural context will help here. Antioch was the place that people came from all over the world and gathered into this one city. One could see all the world's richness and diversity in this one place. And the marketplace was its hub and the city had a diversity of pagan temples ever were. They all offered demonic sensual gratification for payments to the priests and women therein. Antioch was designed like most cities of that day. Standing was a circular wall on the outside, a marketplace in the center, with the interior of the city wall in a way that divided different people groups from one another. Just like Toronto, Canada of today.

Entering into this city was Christ in His Glory within His followers speaking the Gospel. The True Church came to Antioch and began breaking down the dividing barriers in a way that upset the society's existing categories. People from all parts of the city the Jews and Gentiles alike were suddenly coming together as true believers. This group of people was redefining the community in a radical and unprecedented way, so much so, that darkness planted and required a new word so all could come under a black cloaking

umbrella This was needed to categorize what in their world was happening.

What's interesting here is that there were so many off shooting sects within Judaism (antichrist) that Antiochians (pagans) who never bothered to learn or categorize differently. Most never came to the truth, therefor no proper baptism of His name. Never understanding that it was only His name we were to proclaim and have our presents therein. They refused to be known as the Israel of God, our Holy Name was given by Yehovah Himself. Therefore being called Christians required no comment to Christ or His requirements. Many saw that something different was happening and took the easy way for public acceptance, therefor they merged into this deception. The term Christian comes from the world's realization that something new and unheard of was happening and needed a label. They first called each other with this new label therefor putting on the strange coat of deception. This strange coat of sin is all over the world today. For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye once learned. One says I am Baptist, Pentecostal, or Catholic while others say I am Full Gospel all are unlearned exposing their true condition, they are all uncircumcised in heart.

After Acts 11:26 the word "Christians is used only two other times in the New Testament: in Acts 26:28 by Agrippa, an unbelieving King that applied the name he knew as an outsider and 1 Peter 4:16 in the context of being oppressed in the wider society under that given name. In each reference, the emphasis, inherent in the original Greek, is on the fact that people from outside there faith recognized Christians as a distinct growing group.

In Galatians 2:11-17 we can see just how central the diversity of the Antioch situation was to the definition of what it meant to be a Christ-follower. Peter, who had been living side-by-side with Jews and Gentiles, broke the unity of the community when he chose to withdraw from the Gentiles to a group of conservative Jews who had come to town. Peter was "afraid of what this group would think or do. This led other Jewish believers to do the same and withdraw from their non-Jewish brethren. Peter struggled to get his heart to change in line with what he knew to be true. This case was no different. We all must study to show our self approved unto God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. We must stand and never waver being a tree of Right-mess being firming planted, never wavering, bearing fruit and expressing His Love. Living and knowing that we are the Israel Of God.

Paul confronts Peter on this and admonishes him publicly to set the record straight, calling his behavior hypocrisy. Calling Peter out in public was harsh, but the future of Gentile and the true honor to our King was at stake. The Gentiles from whom Peter withdrew got the message loud and clear that they were somehow second-class which is clearly out of line with the Gospel "we are all as One".

Where there is division, the Gospel brings unity, where there is brokenness, healing. The racist split Peter caused among the people suggested that the church wasn't any different from the rest of the world after all giving others a reason to say, "So what? to just another belief system. Division along racial lines is not just wrong; it causes outrage, an offense to the Gospel itself and betrays its definitive a watered-down distinctiveness in the world.

In response, Paul reaffirmed the unity of the body, the centrality, and sufficiency of Christ, and the unique inclusiveness of the new community of those called Christians. He took the social divisions of the world serious and so should we. Are we living up to our given name? Do our cities look like Antioch? Does our church? Do our hearts? The very elect is but a few. In any given church building by how many names do the people actuary hide under. The truth is to abide in the name of our baptism "Jesus the Christ" one must maintain oneself in Holiness. The world has many names while we only have one.

Do we defy the world's categories? Are we able to show the world a vision of community in which there is no social, economic, racial, or gender division (Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:10-11)? Or are we serving as instigators of division?

Perhaps this is why you hear many Christians turning from that name, giving rise to phrases like "I'm a Christ-follower, not a Christian because they no longer like what it means to be Christian of this world.

Ancient Antiochians pushed that name because of early Christian's radical inclusivity, but today, it's up to us to truly see and keep that truth reviled. Because the "Christian label is for ever-redefining based on the reputation given to it. But it has never been and never will be the name given by our Lord to live and forever have our being in.

Jesus said that this world does not get a vote as to how they will know that we are His: "By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have a love for one another as you keep and proclaim His commands."

And today, it's up to us to recover that distinction to deny and defy the world's categories placed out in a way that the unlearned rush to except as thereon. "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. "

For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye have learned somewhat. All of His led ones must detach themselves of the chokes of selfishness and put on the Lord

Jesus, who is the Christ.

I know this record is true, it is His work from the hearts of others through the age. This word is made from my knowledge gathered gracefully over 58 years. Yet today is given through my heart to you personally.

His son under and in His Blood forever.

By my hand and the hand of others

Walter McNeill