

THE DENIAL OF JESUS' NAME

As strange as it may sound, there are people that say they follow the teachings of Jesus the Christ but who refuse to address themselves as 'Christian'. A reason for shunning the name 'Christian' is that there are many churches whose members call themselves Christian but observe festivities and practices that are not Christian but actually pagan in origin. It is believed that because such people pollute Christian practices, the true followers of Christ should not use the title 'Christian'. The problem with this line of belief is that it is not scripturally-based and is merely one's contrived idea. The reasoning may seem logical, but are we, who follow the Christ, justified to forsake the title 'Christian'? One thing we need to remember is that thousands of the early saints had shed their blood for bearing the title Christian. We should ask ourselves: if the early followers died for bearing that title, does it make sense that we abandon the title on a whim? Would it not make the sacrifices of the early church martyrs for nothing?

What does 'Christian' even mean? It means one who follows the teachings of Christ or a Christ follower. Ask yourselves: if you believe and accept Jesus as your Saviour, does it make sense to avoid use of the title 'Christian'? We know that many denominations call on the name of Jesus and its members bear the title name Christian while engaging in practices that maybe contrary to Biblical teachings but that is not a reason for abandoning a title that the early church members bore proudly, even unto their deaths. Remember that on judgment day, God will deal with those who may have called themselves Christian but were of this world and not of Christ. We need to ensure that whatever beliefs we live by, they should be based on Scriptures and not on man's notions. Our faith should be founded upon the teachings of Jesus the Christ.

What does the Bible say about use of the name Christian? The first text we will quote is Acts 11:25, 26: ***"Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus for to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."*** There are three texts in the Bible where the word "Christian" appears. The other two texts are Acts 26:28,29 and I Peter 4:16. These texts prove that the saints of Jesus bore the title 'Christian' which signified they were believers and followers of the Christ of God.

Another reason to try and justify the abolishment of using the title Christian is to suggest that the word "Christian" was only used against the followers of Jesus in a derogatory manner. This argument can be shown to be incorrect. In the years after Jesus' resurrection, most of the persecution of early Christians came from zealous Jewish religious parties. The time frame for this was between 27 A.D. 70 A.D. During this intense period of religious fervor, none of the Jewish religious parties would have referred to the followers of Jesus as Messiah followers, not even in its Greek form of Christian. The reason being the name means "followers of the Messiah" (or followers of the "Anointed of God") so to have used that name, the Jews would have been acknowledging that Jesus was the Messiah. The Jewish sects would never have used the term 'Christianos' (ie. 'Christian' in Greek) even as a ridiculing remark, since that would denigrate the Messiah yet to come. Most Jews would have likely referred to Jesus by the name of Yehoshua ben Yowceph (Jesus, son of Joseph).

As time went on, a number of Roman historians ridiculed the Christians, not on the basis of their title but on the substance of their beliefs. There was in fact a

derogatory term used by the Jews for early Christians. This derogatory name was 'Nazarene'. The orator, Tertullus (Acts 24:1), whose service had been retained by the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, used the term 'Nazarene' in the accusation against Paul (Acts 24:1 to 5). However, remember that Tertullus was representing the Jews in their accusation against Paul, before the Roman procurator, Felix. Tertullus therefore, would not have used the term "Christian" in reference to Paul in the presence of his Jewish patrons, even though he himself was probably a Roman. For Tertullus to have used the title 'Christian' (ie. Messiah follower) in reference to Paul would have been offensive to the Jews he represented. The Jews were still awaiting for the Messiah and had not realized he had already come in the man Jesus. The following statement made by Tertullus to Felix about Christians shows the term 'Nazarene' was applied to them in a derogatory manner. Acts 24:5: ***“For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”*** Given that this event with Paul was thought to have taken place in 55 A.D. and it is believed that Jesus' followers had been referred to as 'Christians' since about 41 A.D., then why did Tertullus refer to Paul as a ringleader of the Nazarenes? In all probability, this was likely prompted by the Jewish belief that nothing good could come out of Nazareth. Nathanael's statement upon hearing about Jesus in the Gospel of John reflects the Jewish belief about Nazareth. ***“And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?”*** John 1:46. Given Tertullus represented the Jews and according to Jewish culture, it was an insult to be referred to as a Nazarene, one could see that Tertullus would try to demean Paul before the procurator, Felix.

The origin of the contempt for Nazareth likely arose because it is located in Galilee. The people of Judaea looked upon the Galileans as an uncultivated people with their unusual dialect and contact with surrounding heathen nations given the migrants travelling through that region. During different periods of time, Galilee was occupied and settled by large numbers of foreigners, who, over time, integrated with the local Jewish population. ***“Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.”*** Isaiah 9:1, 2. It should be pointed out that even though Jesus was raised in Nazareth of Galilee, he was actually born in Bethlehem of Judaea.

In Matthew 21:11, upon Jesus entering into Jerusalem, it states: ***“And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.”*** The reference to the location where Jesus grew up was not likely said in a derogatory manner in this instance. This is because the multitude who made the statement were believers that Jesus was the Christ and had just previously praised Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. It would seem that the multitude of believers in the Christ were taking this opportunity to reprove the Judean Jews of their debasing proverbs about Nazareth of Galilee and of a prophet coming out of this area, by their answer to the Jews of Jerusalem who had asked “Who is this?” when Jesus entered the city. The remark of Jesus being a prophet from Nazareth could have been strictly a proclamation of the Anointed One or might have been said in a gleeful boasting attitude because their southern brethren's proverbs were proven wrong. The full text from Matthew 21:9 to 11 reads: ***“And the multitude that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the Highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.”***

The summation of our discussion is this: There is no name under heaven that mankind can find salvation in other than the Christ of God. The children of God will bear that name of God's Christ but they will be mocked for bearing it. ***“Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?”*** James 2:7. But with God, this name has been exalted above all. ***“Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.”*** Philippians 2:9. And there was to be another people called out for his name. ***“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.”*** Acts 15:14. That name that God gave was derived from the Christ of God, a name above all names. The children of God should wear this name, Christian, without shame.