

How Great Is Your Name?

By Rico Brown

September / October 2017

James wrote to his fellow Christians of wealthy sinner of the world who “blaspheme(d) the honorable name by which (they are) called” (James 2:7). What was the holy name to which James referred? Today’s world is teeming with hundreds of sects and cults, all claiming to represent Christ. Each group has a name chosen to represent their peculiar group. Some, such as Lutherans, prefer to be known by the name of their founder. Others, such as Presbyterians and Episcopalians, have a name that declares their form of government. Some, like the Baptists, wish to be known for their cherished rite of immersion. Others are known by their place of origin or dominance (i.e. Church of England or Roman Catholic Church). In the first Christian century, the followers of Christ were content with “Christian”, which God had bestowed upon them.

Hundreds of years before Christ was born, Isaiah had predicted that God would give his people “a name better than the sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah 56:5; 65:15). Luke tells us “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). The word rendered “called” is *chrematizo*. Its primary significance is “to have business dealing with.” They were publicly called Christians, because this was their chief business; thus fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy.

Enemies of Christ and His cause often hurled insults and derogatory names on the disciples, but God recognized them as followers of His beloved Son. Peter, who had heard all the hateful names that wicked men could devise, reminded his brethren, “if any man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God.” (1 Peter 4:16)

We can understand how and why the enemies of Christ would ridicule the name worn by His disciples. Their hatred and spite are obvious. The great mystery is why believers in Christ who profess to be his followers place such little value upon that holy name. In contrast, God’s people seek to glorify God in the name **Christian**. Another example is those who deny that the name “Christian” was divine. They assert that what Luke really meant was, the disciples were called Christians, not by God, but by their enemies who cast it upon them as an insult and slur. They cannot conceive that God would bestow on his people a name honoring Christ. If their assertion be true, then the name “Christian” is no more sacred than “Tea Party” or “Campbellite.”

To those we ask, if this is true, why did the Holy Spirit through Peter say, “if ye are reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye...if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed” (1 Peter 4:14, 16). Similarly, we consider those among us who evidently are so ashamed of the name of Christ that they are called by some other name, such as “Community Church.” So long as we live, may we never be ashamed to be known as the Church of Christ. He established the church (Matthew 16:18). On the cross, He purchased the church (Ephesians 1:22). The church is described as His bride (Ephesians 5:23). It is His spiritual body of believers (1 Corinthians 12:27). Paul referred to the great brotherhood of churches of his day as “the churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16). Surely this is sufficient proof for a name that honors Christ. Which church do you belong to? The church of Christ we hope! What is your religion? For we are Christians – nothing more, nothing less!