

"Just a Christian"

Did you know you that you can be a member of the church that Jesus purchased with His own blood without belonging to any denomination? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. And, this is a Bible study, "In SEARCH of the Lord's Way." And today we're going to explore how you can be just a Christian, just a member of the Lord's church.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. The Bible is God's wonderful message of faith, truth, hope, and love. God gave us His Word to teach us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to reprove us, and to give us eternal life. John 20 verses 30 to 31 says, "Now Jesus did many other signs (miracles) in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The more we study the Bible, the stronger our faith becomes; and that faith leads to life in his name. Thanks for taking time with us today; let's study together each week.

Now, if I told you that I just bought a car, you'd ask, "What kind of car did you get?" It's pretty difficult to talk about cars these days without talking about some kind of car. We want to know the make and the model. Is it a hybrid or an SUV? What color is it? If I said, "It's just a car!" well we'd have no concept of that; but you know the very first car was simply a car, an automobile. It was the one and only automobile.

And, when you speak of being a member of a church, the first thing people ask is, "What kind of church is it?" They want to know if we go to a community church or a denomination. Well the idea of being just a Christian and simply being a member of the Lord's church, the church Jesus built is foreign to the thinking of most people. But as you read the New Testament, the church is simply "the church." There was no kind of church.... Did you know you could be a member of that original church? That you can be a Christian, just a Christian!

Well we're offering the information on this program free. And, if you'd like a printed copy, we'll give you this little book or a CD of our study. And we ask that you mail a request to us, In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. Now, we also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, and explore what it means to be just a Christian.

Our reading today comes from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 1 verses 10 to 13. "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" Here is a serious problem in this church and Paul is trying to deal with it. Let's pray together. Father we're grateful that you have given us your word to help us through the struggles that we face in life. And, that you can lead us in the right way. We pray father that your will will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. In Jesus' name, amen.

When people speak of the church that they attend, they usually classify themselves as denominational or nondenominational. There are many kinds of community churches and denominations. Various denominations developed when religious people began holding to their own

opinions about God's teaching to the point they refused to work with others. They began spreading their peculiar doctrines or practices. And in time they needed a name to represent them. Well, this name became a sort of brand or trademark for that particular kind of church. It became a denomination.

Now, taking up a brand name implies a division. A denomination is actually a "named division." The divided church at Corinth had members lining up behind individuals and separating themselves by following this name or that. Some followed Paul and said "I am of Paul," some Apollos, and some Peter. Paul was horrified! He said in 1 Corinthians 1:13, "Is Christ divided? And of course the answer is "no". Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" The answer to these questions is no. No, Christ isn't divided! No, Paul wasn't crucified for you! No, you weren't baptized in the name of Paul!

Now, many denominations ask their members to go beyond faith in Christ and vow to follow the denominational bylaws or official statements. They follow their brand of Christianity; now, this commitment to their doctrines and practices define them as a certain kind of Christian. Well, isn't this exactly the kind of division Paul was speaking against? You know, after many generations have passed with a certain "brand name" Christianity, people have become so satisfied and settled in their ways, that they never dreamed the Lord disapproves of such divisions.

Have you ever broken a favorite dish? Well when it happened, you probably groaned and wished you could put it back together in its pure and original state. Our religious world is spiritually broken. We need to leave this broken condition and go back to the original church, the one that's found in the New Testament. And we seek to bring back the pure and unbroken church, as God intended, by returning to the truth and the ideals that are found in the New Testament.

In the early 1800s people who loved God grew weary of the fighting and division among Christian denominations. They believed the Lord wanted His people to be united. And, they realized all of the bad-mouthing and exclusiveness of the denominations actually shamed the name of the Lord. Their constant conflicts and divisive ways caused people to fall away from Christ in disbelief.

The Lord Jesus prayed in John 17 verses 20 to 23, "I do not ask for these only," speaking of the Apostles "but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."

Now, the early church believed the division and animosity came from people holding to human opinions, creeds, councils, human practices, and names. They believed the only way they could have togetherness and unity was to unite on what the Lord taught.

Now, many Christians left Europe to find religious peace in America but they found the same conflicts here. Well, they wanted something better—they wanted a pure and true Christianity free from the stains of human opinions. They believed, "You know if we abandon the human and we concentrate on what is truly divine, that we can unite." And this unity could only come from following the truth in God's Word. This meant they had to cast off everything human and denominational and return to the Christianity found in the New Testament, a Christianity that knew nothing of denominationalism.

They rejected human opinions and human innovations, since these things do not find their authority in God's word but in men. They believed that "nothing ought to be forced upon Christians as

articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion; but what is expressly taught, and enjoined upon them, in the word of God." They said, "We speak where the Bible speaks, and we are silent where the Bible is silent." They wanted unity in essentials, freedom in matters of opinion, and love in all things. They wanted a pure and true faith in Christ alone found in New Testament as their only source of their faith and practice.

Now, sadly sometimes people leave the pure, inspired teaching of God and pursue what they want. The New Testament predicted that Christians would fall away from the truth of the gospel into error and false religion. God knew the hearts of men would often follow their own paths.

Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20 verses 29 to 30, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them." Paul, by inspiration, realized that when you twist the teaching, you cause people to fall away from the truth and from God.

Paul warned Timothy in 1 Timothy 4 verses 1 to 3, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." The devil is a deceiver; he intends to lead people to believe false teachings and lies about certain practices being God's will. He doesn't care who he hurts by deceiving people.

Paul knew Christians would be weak like ancient Israel and would wander away from God's teaching. He knew they would rather believe a comforting lie than to hold to the gospel truth. Inspired of God, he predicted in 2 Timothy 4 verses 3 and 4, that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." You know once a lie gets perpetuated, later generations become convinced that this falsehood is true; they don't know they've been deceived. And many people are that way today.

Many today want salvation, but they don't want to take up a cross to follow Jesus. They want a Savior but not a Lord. They're comfortable believing a lie and will actually oppose the truth at times. They're so settled in what they believe, that they don't want to hear it could actually be wrong. For instance, early church history confirms that Christians wandered away from the teaching and practices found in the New Testament. The New Testament, for instance, says nothing about holy water, nothing about lent, penance, infant baptism, intercession of the saints, sprinkling for baptism, sacrifice of mass, celibacy of priests, purgatory, priestly absolution, a pope, instrumental music in Christian worship, salvation by faith only, or the doctrine of "once saved, always saved."

You see, century by century believers moved farther away from the simplicity of New Testament Christianity. They no longer followed God's pattern for the church in the New Testament but became something different. If we're to please God, we must return to what God willed in the New Testament. Now, returning is necessary, because repentance is necessary. One cannot remain in error and still please God.

James 5 verses 19 to 20 says, "My brothers, even if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." By ceasing to follow manmade doctrines and practices, the church could restore the doctrine, worship and organization of the New Testament church.

Our intent is to follow the teaching and the ideals of the New Testament. The Lord Jesus built His church before any denomination existed. And we want to be in His church, the church that was purchased with His blood. His church is not denominational, inter-denominational, or even non-denominational. You see the church Jesus built was undenominational. It was pre, that is before there were any denominations. Jesus would never approve of unifying the truth with error, because Jesus wants the church to remain holy and pure.

Churches of Christ strive to “do Bible things in Bible ways and call Bible things by Bible names.” They believe they must “discard from their faith and their practice everything that isn’t authorized by the New Testament of the Lord and Savior, and to believe and practice whatever is there enjoined, or instructed.”

This desire to restore New Testament Christianity grew out of a conviction that the Bible is the complete and final authority. The scripture is sufficient to teach us all we need to know for eternal life and godliness. Now, just as a seed will produce only after its own kind, so the seed of God’s word will produce the same Christianity today it did in the first century. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 8 and verse 11 that the seed of the kingdom is the word. Well, the Bible gives us all of God’s revealed, his whole revealed will for life and godliness. Jesus promised His apostles that they would be guided into all the truth (John 16 verses 12 to 13). And if men go beyond this Word and preach other things, they will not only lose their relationship with God (2 John 9), they will also produce a different product than the church Jesus built. And who would want that?

Some believe the primary goal of restoration is to unite all churches. They believe Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17 means that all churches should embrace one another on the basis of the most fundamental things. And in their minds there are very few essentials. Some feel as long as a person believes in and loves Jesus, that he’s right with God. And they seem to ignore everything else that Jesus said and embrace only what He said about unity.

But before Jesus prayed for unity in John 17 verses 20 to 23, He first prayed for His followers to be sanctified or “set apart” in the truth (John 17:17). We can’t have unity without the truth. We can’t blend truth with all kinds of error and still have unity. Christians are to buy the truth and not sell it (Proverbs 23:23). Jesus said, “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8 verses 31 and 32).

Christ didn’t pray for a unity that sacrifices or compromises the truth. Actually, it’s our faith in the revealed truth that unites us. Christian unity is not ecumenism, where groups unite but maintain conflicting and contradictory beliefs and practices, no. No, uniting with those who teach or worship in error sells out the truth for compromise. To be faithful and true to the Lord, Christians cannot ignore or tolerate error like the ancient churches at Pergamum or Thyatira did. You know Jesus called them to repentance, and He calls us to repentance as well.

Well why are we talking about this? Because our love for God and the souls of men means speaking out against error and speaking for the truth. Loving the Lord means loving the truth that He taught and loving what is written in the New Testament. Let me ask you, “Isn’t the church of our Lord, purchased by the blood of Jesus, given to the world through His inspired apostles and prophets, isn’t it good enough? How could we dare to change it or think we could improve on it? We can’t! That’s why we must leave everything that violates the will of God and return to the pure teaching. We must remain in God’s Word. Let’s pray together. Oh father helps us to remain pure and true to your word and to never leave it in anyway. And may your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. In Jesus’ name, amen.

God expects His people to leave sin when they learn the truth. Repentance leaves what is wrong and does what is right. When the church at Pergamum in Revelation 2 strayed by holding to the false teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, Jesus sternly warned them to “repent therefore or else I am coming to you quickly.” In the same chapter Jesus also warned the church at Thyatira not to “tolerate” the false prophetess Jezebel or her teachings but to repent. When people believe or practice something false, God expects them to repent.

Now, calling people back to the truth is to save their souls. We must get right with God. This is true, whether we make our plea to an individual, to a group of individuals, or to a church. To follow Christ, we need to put away what comes from man and follow what comes from God.

Love the Lord, get right with God, and get involved in the Lord’s church. Place your faith in Jesus as the Christ; repent of every sin; confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God; and out of love be baptized into Christ. Peter told the people at Pentecost in Acts 2:38, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Both repentance and baptism are necessary. The New Revised Standard Version says of Acts 2:38, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Many have come to believe falsely that baptism is unnecessary, but more than a dozen recent translations show one must be baptized to receive forgiveness. Won’t you be baptized today?

Well we hope today’s study helps you understand the church. We’re offering a free booklet, entitled, “Christ’s Glorious Church.” It will be a blessing to you. And if you want the booklet or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now, our programs appear on our website at www.searchtv.org. We offer Bible Correspondence courses. If you want one, let us know. And we offer free study sheets that go with our programs. And you can download them free before each program at our website or call and request them. Now, if you call us we won’t ask you for money or put you on a list.

But we do ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ. They love you and they support our ministry. If you are looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ want guests, and you’ll be glad you became a part of the family. We’ll be back next week, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God’s Word with us and we want you to tell a friend about this program. As ways, God bless you and we love you from all of us, In Search of the Lord’s Way.