

Names Of New Testament Christianity

Introduction

1. One of the distinct features of New Testament Christianity is the different terms by which God's people were known in New Testament times that we can read about in the inspired word of God.
 - a. Critically, names or designations can be used to both identify and describe a function of a person or a thing, such as a spoon, a husband, a wife, a prime minister or a Christian.
 - b. Often, multiple names can be given to a person or thing to describe different functional aspects, e.g., spoon: utensil, cutlery; or man: husband, father, bus driver.
2. New Testament Christianity demands that we identify ourselves by terms we find in the New Testament scriptures (cp. Jude 3; cp. 1 Cor. 4:6, 17 cp. Gal. 2:7-9).
 - a. In New Testament times God's people were identified by certain individual terms such as disciples, Christians, saints, and by collective terms such as church, kingdom, house and a temple.
 - b. However, these are *descriptive* designations of particular roles and responsibilities, as is commonly used.
 - c. As a basic and simple lesson, our aim is to consider briefly some of the different individual descriptive terms and the responsibilities that are defined in Scripture.

I. Disciples

- A. While there were disciples of Jesus prior to the establishment of the church, Jesus would view those that responded to the gospel message as His disciples (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 6:1, 7; 9:1).
 1. The Greek *Mathetes* denotes "a learner" (Strong's: 3101), and is derived from *Manthano* which means "to learn" (Strong's: 3129).
 2. According to Webster, a disciple is, "a learner; a scholar; one who receives or professes to receive instruction from another; a follower; an adherent to the doctrines of another".
 3. A disciple of Jesus, therefore, is a person that subjects him or herself to the teachings of Christ (Acts 2:38, 42; cf. Luke 10:16; John 16:12-15; 2 Peter 3:2).
- B. Being a disciple of Jesus comes with certain responsibilities in keeping with the two chief aspects of denoting a learner and a follower:
 1. Students of God' word – John 8:31-32; Hebrews 5:12-14; 2 Peter 3:16-18.
 2. Recognition and establishing Bible authority – 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3 Colossians 3:17.
 3. Imitating Christ – John 13:13-17; Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 2:21.

II. Christians

- A. Some years after the church was established Luke tells us that the disciples were called "Christians", a name that identified them as belonging to Christ, or the anointed One (Acts 11:26; cf. 1 Peter 4:16).
 1. "Christianos...a word formed after the Roman style, signifying an adherent of Jesus, was first applied to such by Gentiles...As applied by Gentiles there was no doubt an implication of scorn, as in Agrippa's statement in Acts 26:28. Tacitus, near the end of the first century, says, 'The vulgar call them Christians. The author or origin of this denomination, Christus, had, in the reign of Tiberius, been executed by the procurator, Pontius Pilate (Annals xv.44). From the second century onwards the term was accepted by believers as a title of honor'" (Vine's).
 2. "A believer in the religion of Christ; a professor of his belief in the religion of Christ" (Webster).
- B. The term "Christian", therefore, is the name of a disciple or adherent of Christ and reinforces the fundamental idea of follower and professor of His teachings. There are a number of responsibilities that grow out of this relationship:
 1. Allegiance to Christ – Matthew 23:8-10; Romans 6:17, 7:4; Ephesians 5:23-31.
 2. Recognition of one religion, one church – John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13.

III. Saints

- A. In New Testaments times, members of the church were also called “saints”, a term that was applied to all believers (1 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 4:21. 2 Thess. 1:10).
1. Vine says, “As used of believers, it designates all such and is not applied merely to persons of exceptionally holiness, or to those who, having died, were characterized by exceptional acts of ‘saintliness’”.
 2. **Hagios**: “Fundamentally signifies ‘separated’, and, hence, in Scripture in its moral and religious significance, separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God...It is used of men...in so far as they are devoted to God...These are called ‘saints,’ i.e., ‘sanctified’ or ‘holy ones’” (Vine’s).
- B. The term “saint”, therefore, is reserved for those that, having obeyed the gospel, have been set apart and, thus, devoted to God and His purposes (1 Cor. 6:9-11, 19-20; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 10:29). Being a “sanctified one” comes with its responsibilities:
1. Called to a life of religious and moral purity – Romans 6:1-7; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:15-16.
 2. Recognition of the importance of worship – 1 Corinthians 14:26; Hebrews 10:25; Hebrews 13:15.

IV. Brethren

- A. The designation “brethren” is a collective term; identical to brothers, as rendered in some Bible versions. It denotes community, fellowship and a bond that exist between believers (Matt. 23:8-9; cf. Gal. 6:1; Col. 1:1).
1. **Adelphos** denotes “a brother, or near kinsman...in the plural a community based on identity of origin and life” (Vine’s); “a fellow believer” (Thayer).
 2. For the Christian, the term denotes a relationship and a bond with those that are introduced into God’s family having been born again (John 1:12-13; 1 Peter 1:22-23; Eph. 3:15; Heb. 2:12).
- B. As brethren it is not only important that we each recognize each other as such but that we fulfill the responsibilities that come with such a relationship:
1. Showing love for one another is not only indicative of a follower of Christ but proof of our love for God (1 Jno. 5:1-2; cp. John 13:34-35; Eph. 5:1-2).
 2. We love one another when we serve to meet each other’s spiritual, as well as physical, needs which includes developing a loving and caring relationship (Rom. 12:9-13; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 4:15; 1 Jn. 3:16).

Conclusion

1. Though the temptation might be to view all these different roles in isolation from each other, we must guard against doing precisely that (cp. Acts 9:1, 13; 11:26; Colossians 1:1).
2. We have considered just a few of the terms by which God’s people were addressed in New Testament times that reflect different individual responsibilities.
3. To use terms or names other than what we find is to go beyond the limits of scriptural authority and undermine our claim to practice New Testament Christianity (cp. Matthew 7:21).