

## ***Simply Christians***

We read with interest the reports on every hand of the growing disenchantment with present religious forms which originated in the Middle Ages and have become meaningless. We hear of displeasure with denominational structures and their pronouncements which reflect only the preferences of influential elite, ignoring the convictions of the rank and file. Because of these aspects of modern religion, some have decided that Christianity is not even relevant to this day and age. We believe they have so decided because they are not sufficiently acquainted with the scriptures to be able to distinguish between the relevant gospel of Christ, and the things men have added to religion since, and which truly are not relevant to serving God.

If some of these things have troubled you, and you have felt an urge, or even a yearning, to return to the simple uncomplicated religion of Christ, and if you have felt the desire to strip away all non-essential elements of religion and simply abide by the truths of Christ, truths which alone can transform the soul and bind it to God, let us suggest that such a possibility actually exists.

Let us begin with one essential fact. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. His coming (Gen. 49:10), His mission (Is. 53; Zech. 6:13), and His new message (Jer. 31:31-33) were all foretold in the Old Testament, which Jehovah used to govern Israel until the Christ should come and establish the New for all mankind (Gal. 3:19)!

The New Testament is the word of Christ. It reveals the religion of Christ (Heb. 9:15-17). By studying it we become aware that among the followers of Christ no denominational organizations have existed whatsoever. All such began at a later time. We see people hearing the gospel and in faith obeying the conditions of God's grace. That is, they turned to God and were baptized in order to be forgiven of their sins. Being thus saved, they were added to the Lord's people, or church (Acts 2:36-47). As the gospel spread, we find them assembling together in congregations in various localities. Each congregation was under its own elders (Acts 14:23) and no one else on earth. These elders could not make laws or be masters. They were given the responsibility of tending and caring for the congregation as shepherds would a flock (Acts 20:17,28; 1Pet. 5:1-3)! The only headquarters those disciples knew was heaven, where their head Jesus Christ was and is (Eph. 1:22-23).

Their worship was something to participate in, not something to watch. On the first day of the week, for instance, they would eat the Lord's Supper and hear preaching (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-29). They would share their mutual responsibilities by sharing their prosperity, and we find contributions being collected on no other day than the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Incidentally, no hierarchy could tax them or tell them how much to give. They had no organizations clamoring for their support. They gave as they individually purposed in their own heart (2 Cor. 9:6-7). In their assemblies they all would sing (Eph. 5:19), and all pray with various ones leading (1 Cor. 14:15-16). In all this they were all necessarily involved, for each saved person was a priest (Rev. 1:5-6). No one could perform his service or worship for him.

They lived godly lives. They cared for their poor. They taught others. They sent out preachers where they could not go. With simplicity of faith and fervor there was no need of centralization. Without organized machinery the gospel was preached throughout civilization in a short time (Col. 1:23). These disciples of Christ were known as Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). They wore no sectarian names. Their religion was not sensual or materialistic. They sought not to impress men with pious ceremony. They sought to impress God with the only thing that has ever impressed him, contrite obedience (1 Sam. 15:22). Their appeal was not social or recreational. They offered the gospel to a troubled world for it was God's power to save (Rom. 1:16), and any other appeal was beneath them.

"If only such could be today," many say. But it is! Free men and women over the earth have despaired of denominationalism, seeing in it no necessity or relevance and only a cause of division. They desire the simplicity of what Christ authored. They are related and connected only in Christ and not in some earthly organization.

A group of such people meets within minutes of where you live. We are just Christians. We worship and serve God in the same way as the early disciples. Christ is our only creed and the Scriptures our only guide. We are not members of any human denomination, but simply a congregation, or church, of Christ. We would like thus to share Christ with you and with the entire world.

**You too can be just a Christian** and serve God without belonging to any denomination, bound by no denominational laws or obligations. If such freedom appeals to you, please visit with us, or contact us.

**- by Dale Smelser**

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### ***Things Expected of All Members***

One of the great blessings that God has for His children is the fellowship they can enjoy as members of a local congregation. We believe that this involvement in a local church is an important part of God's plan for our spiritual well being. In this special, spiritual family there are things that are expected of all the members. Here are some of the things that will help us bring glory and praise to God as we work together:

1) Each of us must realize that the example we set in the local community has a great potential for good or evil. As a member of this local church it is expected that you will live a pure moral life -- one that others will be able to observe and imitate (Matthew 5:16). The world accepts and even encourages immoral activities, but as Christians we are not to be "of this world" (1 John 2:15-17).

2) We believe that it is the responsibility of each member to seek opportunities to serve their brothers and sisters. Too many view the church from a selfish perspective and seem interested only in what might be done for them. Instead, we understand that greatness in the Lord's kingdom comes from providing humble service (Matthew 23:11,12). We are to "rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15). There will be many occasions to share in one another's joys, and with tenderness and sympathy to bear one another's burdens. As a member of this local body we need your help in these important ways.

3) Unfortunately, there will be times when a brother or sister may slip back and begin to engage in sinful activities. You are expected to exercise a care and watchfulness for your brethren in these matters (Hebrews 3:13). There are times when we need to faithfully warn, rebuke and admonish a fellow member (2 Timothy 4:2, Galatians 6:1). This may even lead to the unpleasant task of withdrawing from an unruly Christian (2 Thessalonians 3:14). Your full cooperation and support is expected if, and when, such becomes necessary.

**(Continued next week)**

**- by Greg Gwin**