

Christians with No Denominational Ties

God places great emphasis on names. He changed Abram's name to Abraham (Gen. 17:5), Sarai's name to Sarah (Gen. 17:15), and Jacob's name to Israel (Gen. 32:38). He gave to John and Jesus their names before they were born (Luke 1:13,31). He has given to His people of this age the name "Christian" (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). He has given no sectarian or denominational names, but rather condemns them (1 Cor. 1:10-13). The great need of our day is for men and women to forsake their denominational ties, be nothing but Christians, and call themselves "Christians," with no other religious names.

It is of interest to note that leaders in the prominent denominations, including some of their founders, recognized and preached this truth. N. B. Hardeman, in his *Tabernacle Sermons* (Volume IV, pages 216, 217), gives quotes from Charles Spurgeon, Martin Luther, and John Wesley in which they plead for unity.

Charles Spurgeon, a prominent Baptist preacher, is quoted as saying: "I look forward, with pleasure, to the day when there will not be a Baptist living. I hope they will soon be gone. I hope the Baptist name will soon perish; but let Christ's name endure forever." (*Spurgeon's Memorial Library*, Vol. I, page 168).

The quote from Martin Luther: "I pray you to leave my name alone, and call not yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified for anyone. St. Paul would not let any call themselves after Paul, nor of Peter, but of Christ. How then, does it befit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes, to give my name to the children of God? Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions: away with them all; and let us call ourselves only Christians after Him from whom our doctrine comes." (*The Life of Luther*, by Stork, page 289).

Brother Hardeman's quote from John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church: "Would to God that all party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world were forgot; that we might all agree to sit down together as humble, loving disciples at the feet of a common Master, to hear His words, to imbibe His spirit, and to transcribe His life into ours."

We cannot help but wonder what changes would have taken place in religious history had the followers of these men heeded their pleas. The pleas, however, went unheeded. Denominationalism with its religious division exists and will continue to exist until our Lord comes to "root it up" (Matt. 15:13). But meanwhile, no one has to be a part of the denominational system; no one should be a part of it. Today, one can be just a Christian—as was Paul, or Peter, or James, or John with membership in nothing but a local church made up of other Christians. Faithful churches of Christ, with no denominational affiliations, meet throughout the world.

- by Bill Hall

Raised Before Buried?

I have asked this question before, but I want to ask it again. Did Jesus' resurrection occur before He was buried? Before you think I have completely lost all sense of sanity, you need to understand that millions of people, maybe even you, appear to believe that is what happened. Let me explain.

Romans 6:4 says, "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Note the comparison between Christ and us. "That just as Christ...even so we also." What happened to Christ? "Raised from the dead." What parallels that for us? "Walk in newness of life." What events preceded those? For Christ, His burial. For us, baptism. Now if we can have "newness of life" BEFORE baptism, as many teach and believe, then, to maintain the parallel, you must believe Christ was raised before He was buried. "Absurd," you say. I know! That is why I teach baptism is essential to be saved, to become a Christian.

- by Ronny E. Hinds

Things the Father of the Prodigal Son Did NOT Do

There are many things to learn from the famous parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15;11-32). Each of the three characters in the parable – the prodigal, the father, and the elder brother – provides us with essential instruction in spiritual matters. Few Biblical texts have served as the basis for more or more powerful sermons and lessons.

Our emphasis here is on the father, and specifically on some of the things he did NOT do. Consider:

1) He did not try to justify his son's sinful actions. Many parents make this critical mistake. Even when their children have done horrible, devastating wrongs, some parents will make excuses for them. Some have even been known to change their position on basic moral issues if it so happens that their son or daughter has followed that sinful route. This, of course, only makes things worse.

2) He did not continue a normal relationship with his erring son. The reality was that their relationship had been severely altered, not by the father's choices, but rather by the son's. The father accepted this reality, as unpleasant as it was. There was nothing 'normal' in the family as long as this son continued in his sinful ways

3) He did not rush to bail his son out of the trouble he had gotten himself into, and he did not enable him to continue in his sinful lifestyle. Although it's not stated in the text, it's not hard to imagine that the father likely knew where his son was – may well have know about the horrid conditions his son was suffering in the pig pen. But, he did not go there. He did not send some much needed cash to ease the suffering. He did not take any steps to lessen the miserable consequences the boy had reaped by his bad choices. Unfortunately, we see way too many parents these days that, by their actions, actually make it possible for the children to continue in open rebellion to the will of God.

4) He did not forgive and restore his prodigal son until the son repented and sought his forgiveness. It's clear that he was willing to forgive. It's obvious that he was anxious to forgive. He made it easy for his wayward son to seek and receive forgiveness. But notice carefully that he did not forgive the prodigal until the young man "came to himself", humbly returned, and asked for reconciliation. This is the pattern taught throughout the Scriptures, and we must follow it.

5) He never gave up hope for his lost son. As the son was nearing home, "when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." It has been noted that the father must have been constantly watching and always hoping that he would see his son on the horizon. No loving parent can give up hope for a child gone astray.

The father of the prodigal son serves as a great role model for us today. Of course, we believe he is a sort of 'shadow' of our perfect Heavenly Father. Let us strive to be more like Him.

- by Greg Gwin