



September 9, 2016

The Phrase “New Testament Christian”

A while back I heard a comment about the use of the phrase referring to someone as a “New Testament Christian” as being inaccurate since there aren’t any Christians in the Old Testament and there is no other type of Christian. The thought was expressed that this phrase is not needed and perhaps should not be used. The points made were not incorrect. Christians did not exist in the Old Testament and there are no other Christians except for those who believe in Jesus as the son of God. However, I use the phrase and while not defending it as essential, will employ it on occasion depending on the audience that I am addressing. The Bible teaches that those who believe in Christ were called Christians first at Antioch as we read in **Acts 11.26**. This is the fulfillment of a prophecy by Isaiah who stated, **“And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name.”** (Isa 62.2). So why then is it necessary, or even needed to use a phrase such as “New Testament Christian”? In the world we live in today there are thousands of denominations who all call themselves Christian and the members of these organizations refer to themselves as Christians. They have a belief in Christ and God and hold to many of the teachings of the New Testament. If we examine the various doctrines that are taught by the majority of these groups we find that while they base their practices and teachings on the New Testament there are significant differences in what that Bible actually says and what they preach. We know that Christ promised to build his church (**Matt 16.18**) which was established on the day of Pentecost as we read in **Acts 2**. We also know that Christ charged his disciples, the apostles, to carry on his teaching through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (**John 14.26**). These teachings are referred to as the apostles doctrine (**Acts 2.42**). Over time other inspired teachers and preachers carried this same message to others who in turn taught the word received. Paul tells us that **“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”** (Eph 4.4-6). Many today have adopted the teachings of organizations claiming to hold to the doctrine of the New Testament but as we examine these we find changes, additions and omissions of what the word teaches and commands. When speaking to others who have been influenced by these I find that referring to New Testament Christians as such points to the doctrine of the New Testament as written, not as they may have heard. The pitfall here is that millions have been led to believe they are Christians based on teachings that cannot be supported by scripture and the use of a phrase such as this can open a dialogue with them about the true nature of the church, belief and most importantly the need to obey according to the pattern found in the scriptures. Comparing the beliefs that others have with what the scriptures actually teach is a foundation that may help to open their eyes to the error they have accepted. Is it therefore essential that we point this out by using such a phrase? The answer to that is no, but in some cases it may help. As members of the Lord’s church our aim is to direct folks to what is actually taught in the New Testament with the intent of helping them see that they may not have been instructed accurately. This comes as a shock to many who find that something they have based their lives on is not found in the pages of God’s word. There are many zealous, moral and faithful individuals who have never realized there is a difference between what they have been taught and what the Bible teaches. James warns us that we will receive a greater condemnation for teaching something other than the truth (**Jas 3.1**) and many have not been taught the word completely. If using such a phrase helps to bring the differences to light then we may lead someone to the truth and assist them in completing true obedience to the pattern found in the scriptures.

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