When were Christians first called “Christians?”

The Name “Christians”

Today, Christians are called by such names as, Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and many other names. But, according to the Bible, what name should Christians really be called, and why? How long has the term “Christian” been in use, and who invented it? The answer to these questions can be found in the Bible.

“It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians” (Acts 11:26 NAB). God was behind the development of the use of the term “Christians” within a few years of the start of Christianity. Notice how this verse can also be rendered: **“the disciples also were divinely called first in Antioch Christians” (Young’s Literal Translation).**

Years later, at Paul’s final hearing before Roman governor Festus, the governor asked: **“Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so quickly?” (Acts 26:28 NLT)** So obviously, they were being called Christians at this later time as well.

“If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” (1 Peter 4:16 NIV) Being a Christian meant then, and means today, bearing “that name,” not just as a label, but the entire Christian way of life, including suffering, if necessary.

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That's why, apparently, that six times in the book of Acts, Christianity is referred to as "the Way." Notice the references:

Called "The Way"

"Any who belonged to the Way, whether men or women." (Acts 9:2 NIV) Early Christianity was often referred to as "the Way."

"Publicly speaking against the Way." (Acts 19:9 NLT) Early Christians experienced persecution, via slander in this case.

"I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect." (Acts 24:14 NIV) Paul here says he is a follower of the Christian Way, which opposing Jews called a divisive sect.

"I persecuted followers of this Way to their death." (Acts 22:4 NIV) Paul admits his former wrong attitude and action.

"Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way." (Acts 24:22 NIV) "Felix, who was accurately informed about the Way." (Acts 24:22 NAB) Early Christianity was called "the Way," because Christianity was a way of life.

"We know that people everywhere are talking against this sect." (Acts 28:22 NIV) Early Christianity was viewed as a breakaway sect from Judaism.

Other Descriptions, but Not Other Names

In the New Testament, there are other references to the first century Christian groups, such as:

Representing the church as a whole:

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“the church” (Acts 8:3); “the whole church” (Acts 5:11)

the church of God” (Acts 20:28); “the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:4)

“God’s church” (1 Corinthians 1:2)

“the churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16)

“the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15)

“churches of the holy ones” (1 Corinthians 14:33)

Churches in certain cities:

“the church in Jerusalem” (Acts 11:22); “the church at Antioch” (Acts 13:1); “the church in Cenchreae” (Romans 16:1); “God’s church at Corinth” (2 Corinthians 1:1).

These descriptions, while accurately describing early Christians, are not names.

Conclusion

What we learn from these scriptures, then, is that early Christians were called by the name “**Christians**,” and the religion, because it was their way of life, was called **“the Way”.** Other names, including various denominational names, do not fit this Scriptural model of the New Testament church.

Modern day Christians should be called “Christians” because that is what they are called in the Bible.

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For more information about the subject of “name”, please see the following:

https://bibleauthenticity.org/is-gods-name-yah…-lord-or-jehovah/

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