

Just a Christian

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being identified as a Christian, focusing on Christ alone, and avoiding labels that emphasize one aspect of truth over others.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:13, 1 Corinthians 2:2, 1 Corinthians 3:4, 2 Corinthians 11:3, Galatians 3:28

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christian Identity"

Description

Anton Bosch addresses the issue of Christians identifying themselves with specific denominations or labels, emphasizing that a Christian should simply be a follower of Jesus Christ without the need for additional descriptors. He points out that dividing the universal church into sects based on denominational affiliations is not in line with the teachings of the Bible, which recognizes only those who follow Christ. Bosch challenges the practice of labeling preachers based on their beliefs or emphases, highlighting the importance of preaching Christ alone and avoiding the over-emphasis or de-emphasis of any truth over others.

Transcript

I have been struck by how various Christians define themselves. Very seldom do you come across someone who just refers to themselves as "a Christian". They are either Reformed, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Baptist, Biker, Korean, or any of a thousand other kinds of Christian. Some even define themselves with combinations of several descriptors such as "evangelical reformed" or "holiness Pentecostal".

People use these definitions when describing themselves but it has long been a part of church and denomination nomenclature. Consider Reformed, Baptist, Evangelical, Lutheran, Cowboy and a slew of other terms that form part of the name on the side of the building. Nigeria probably sports the most bizarre names with only one common thread - "international". By the way, how can a church be international? Surely a church or assembly is, by definition, a local body of believers. By adding international to the name does that mean it is a virtual church? My skeptical self simply assumes that anyone who adds international to the name of the church has delusions of grandeur and fancies themselves to be in competition with the "catholic" Church.

Here are a few names of actual churches:

The House of God Which is the Church of the Living God the Pillar and Ground of the Truth Without Controversy, Inc. (Keith Dominion). (www.houseofgodclg.org)

Run For Your Life International Chapel (In Nigeria)

First Church of the Last Chance World on Fire Revival and Military Academy (in Dade City, Florida).

I understand that many names were established a long time ago and that many have inherited a church or denomination's name. But, my concern is with the reasons why Christians feel the need to identify themselves as this or that kind of Christian. Surely a Christian is a Christian - a follower of Jesus Christ? And if so, what is wrong with just being a Christian? (I am not referring to the millions who claim to be Christian but are not).

Actually, this is not a new phenomenon. Christians in Corinth identified themselves as "Pauline Christians", Petrine Christians", "Apollos Christians" and "Christ Christians" (1Corinthians 3:4). Paul's response is blunt: If we identify ourselves by any such identifier, we are carnal. "For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal ?" (1 Corinthians 3:4). So let me connect the dots for you: If you identify yourself as this or that kind of Christian - you are actually saying you are carnal!

So what does that say about all the leaders out there who identify themselves as Reformed, Evangelical or Pentecostal? They are carnal. Actually, it is often more than carnal - emphasizing any one aspect of the truth is, by definition, heresy.

Sometimes these descriptions are used out of pride, meaning that people feel superior because they believe in Adam's navel or because they do not believe in Adam's navel . At other times the titles are used in a genuine desire to position ourselves in the wide spectrum of Christianity, or even of Christendom. But by doing so we confirm that dividing the (universal) church is legitimate and that we see ourselves as part of this sect or that subsection of Christianity. But Paul asks: "Is Christ divided?" (1Corinthians 1:13). And elsewhere says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28).

By segmenting the Body of Christ we teach that there can be different kinds of Christians. Yet the Bible only recognizes one kind - those who follow Christ. You either follow Him or you don't. You can't follow Him and be Reformed or Evangelical or Pentecostal, or anything else, because He was, and is, none of those things! Think about it. I know it comes as a shock, but Jesus was not a Pentecostal or Methodist or anything else.

Last time I checked, there is not a separate heaven for Reformed, Evangelical and Pentecostals. (I know some get around this by believing that only their sect will get to heaven.)

Do you really believe Jesus would be happy to be identified as a Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, Assemblies or Baptist? And when He comes, will he come as Full Gospel or Evangelical or will He come as The Christ? Should our goal not be to be identified with Him and Him alone? Surely, it should be sufficient to be just a Christian and thereby confess that Christ is not divided?

Sometimes we do not take those labels to ourselves, but others impose them on us. Think about some of the big-name preachers that you know. How would you identify them? One may be Reformed Evangelical, another may be seeker-sensitive, another may be anti-Pentecostal, or Pentecostal, or any of a hundred other identifiers. Why do we slap these labels on people? Often we do so because they earned them. The

preacher whose pet subject is the hatred of anything Pentecostal is rightly defined as anti-Pentecostal and the preacher who finds material prosperity in every verse of the Bible is rightly labeled as "Prosperity" or "Money Gospel". The same applies to anyone who emphasizes one truth (or error) above all others.

The over-emphasis or de-emphasis of any truth over others is by definition heresy and the fact that people notice that anyone has a particular emphasis, other than Christ, justly results in such an individual being put in a box with a label. (And that's where they should stay - in a box).

I have seldom come across preachers who were simply identified by the fact that they preach Christ! Yet surely Christ should be the central message that pervades everything we preach. Many pay lip service to this theory but few practice it. I just did a search on the internet for the term "preaching Christ". Amongst other things, I came across an excellent article emphasizing the importance of preaching Christ and Him alone. But when I looked at the source, I found it was produced by a ministry whose name emphasizes Calvinism plus water baptism. When I went to their home page I discovered that the first paragraph below their welcome message outlines the five points of TULIP and just below that is a paragraph that mocks a caricature of Arminians. So what that ministry really means when they say they preach Christ is they preach against Arminianism!

An uneducated preacher once said to me that anything that ends with "ism" is wrong. At the time I did not quite agree with him, but today I do. No matter whether it be Buddhism, Arminianism, Calvinism or any of the many other "isms", they have made something other than Christ their focus and have, by definition, demoted the Son of God to a position equal to man, a doctrine or a tradition!

But Paul says: "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2). "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:3).

May we be worthy of the name "Christian".

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