



reIGNITED

FANNING THE FLAMES OF NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

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The Name “Christian”

As a preacher in a new church the question is often asked of me by newcomers: “What *kind* of church is this?” I always tell them that we are a Christian church. Of course, this rarely satisfies the inquirer, who is *really* trying to determine which denomination we belong to!

I like being a “Christian only”. Although I know it’s considered unsophisticated by some of my church planting peers, I still resonate with the simple appeal: “No creed but Christ; no book but the Bible; no name but the divine.”

Throughout the New Testament the followers of Christ are referred to in various ways. On over seventy occasions the New Testament refers to Jesus’ followers as His *disciples*. More frequently the language of family is used. Those who are baptized into Christ become members of the family of God. Therefore the disciples are often referred to as *brothers* and *sisters*. Other appellations occur in the New Testament as well – *saints*, *believers*, *the way*, etc.

But there is yet another New Testament name for God’s people – one that was the subject of prophesy long before its



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application. Isaiah spoke of a day in which the Gentiles would gain admittance into the kingdom and all God’s people would be called by a “new name which the mouth of the Lord shall name” (Isaiah 62:2). This would be a “name better

than of sons and of daughters . . . an everlasting name that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah 56:5).

After the admission of Cornelius and his household, the new name Christian was given to God’s people. Acts 11:26 says, “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” Some readers of the Bible insist that the name Christian was intended as an insult or a nickname – spoken in derision by opponents of the church. While that is possible, it is a conclusion which is nowhere supported by the text. In fact, the text seems to imply the opposite.

Regarding the word “called”, the Bible scholar, H.A. Ironside states:

The Greek word translated “called” really means, “oracularly called,” or “divinely called.” The evidence bears that out. The disciples were first divinely called Christians at Antioch. This was God’s name for them. Now that the work of

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