

Living Up To Your Name

Going Public, Part 2

Selected Scripture

When a leader of the religious group called the Society of Friends stood before a judge in the early 1600's, he was about to be thrown into jail for his beliefs regarding Christianity.

This leader, by the name of George Fox, rather courageously looked at the judge and challenged him with these words, and I quote – “I bid you to tremble at the word of the Lord.”

In response, the judge sarcastically referred to George and his followers as a bunch of Quakers – people, he mocked, who quake or tremble in the way of the Lord.ⁱ

That designation of course wasn't intended as a compliment – it was a term of derision – “Here come those Quakers . . . those tremblers.”

When John and Charles Wesley gathered a tight knit group of believers, they required accountability among each member; and it included a rather methodical system of living which they believed would result in a more holy and honorable lifestyle.

Their detailed and systematic methods soon earned them the name, Methodists, and again, it wasn't necessarily a term of affection.

If you study the New Testament, you discover a number of different names for those who followed Jesus.

One of the earliest designations for believers was the term, “*The Way*” in **Acts 9:2**. Evidently, early Christians were referring to themselves as following Christ who is *the way, the truth and the life* from **John 14:6**.

The Apostles referred to themselves and the church with any number of designations or names; which included disciple, witness, elect of God, saints, children of God, priests, beloved, stewards, slaves of God, brothers and sisters and more.

What's fascinating is that the term we hold most dear for ourselves is a term that believers didn't come up with.

It was coined in the first century by combining the Greek name of the Messiah (Christ) and adding a Latin ending to create Christiani – or, Christian.

Everybody in Rome knew about the Augustiani and the Caesariani and Herodiani – these were followers and avid supporters of Augustus and the Caesar and even Herod.ⁱⁱ

This term, Cristiani, with a Latinized ending, points to an official designation, coined by the

Roman court to designate this growing new religious sect. And it happened, evidently in the Roman court of Antioch.

By the time you get to church in Antioch (Acts 11) where this designation was first given, the believers had already begun pulling away from the Jewish congregations who worshipped on the Sabbath in the synagogue and had begun worshipping their Messiah primarily and, significantly, in the dawning hours of Sunday in honor of Christ's resurrection. A day they would eventually rename in His honor as the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10).

But keep in mind that this designation – Cristiani – wasn't necessarily a compliment! As far as the Romans were concerned, these Christians were strangely following a dead man – a crucified Jew – an evidently failed Messiah who didn't create a kingdom and overthrow Rome after all.

Which is why the Jews rejected Him then and now.

I'll never forget asking a young Jewish woman in Israel why she didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah and she looked at me as if I had fallen off a turnip truck and bumped my head – she said, "Why? Because he died!"

But that isn't the end of the story, is it? And we today, meet throughout this Sunday we have called, as the Apostle John called it – the Lord's Day – to worship Him and thank Him for dying . . . and for rising from the dead and establishing His gospel.

And we love the name, Christian, don't we. We're honored to wear it on our sleeve, so to speak; and we love bumping into people who wear it on their sleeve as well.

I was in the auto store the other day and I needed help with a battery and one of the employees came over and we began to talk about what I needed.

We hadn't talked more than 5 minutes and I wondered if he was a Christian – his demeanor, his helpful spirit, his vocabulary. I was about to ask him where he went to church – which is my way of shifting the conversation from batteries to justification by faith in Christ alone – you know what I mean?

But before I could, he stopped and said, "Hey, are you a Christian?" I said, "I am . . . and I was about to ask you the same thing." He said, "I am too." I said, "I knew it!" He said, "I knew it too." I said, "I knew it first."

We gave each other a big handshake and laughed and began to talk openly about the Lord . . . other customers are moving away from us . . . they don't wanna get caught in some kind of revival. Here's this black man and this white man carrying on like brothers separated at birth.

Why? Because we have the same family name! We love that name – it is the name of our Messiah and our Lord!

Now I know . . . there are a lot of people who claim the name Christian who really have nothing to do with Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Lord.

They call themselves Christians because it's nice. It means they're a good person. Or they use the name because they aren't Buddhists or mass murderers – so they must be Christians. Besides they celebrate Christmas, right? I mean, who wants to lose that?!

So yes . . . you can call me a Christian too! But what makes it for real?!

I have read that in one South American country, any man over the age of 18 is allowed to climb into the ring at the outset of a bull fight. The two stipulations are that they are at least 18 years of age and secondly, that they are sober. No kidding.

It's not unusual to see 100 men climb over the fence and stand proudly in the ring, dressed in bright colors and bowing before all the cheering fans.

But when that gate opens and the bull comes charging in, 100 brightly dressed men run for the fence and get ready to climb out if the bull runs their way.

Every one of them – for a brief moment – carries with pride the temporary title, "Bullfighter". But none of them want to demonstrate in real life, what that name stands for.

It's one thing to say the name . . . it's another thing to live it out.

It's one thing to say you have the name, 'Christiani' – follower of Jesus, the Messiah; it's another thing entirely to demonstrate in real life, what it means.

We're in the middle of defining biblically what it means to demonstrate to our community around us the true meaning of the name Christian.

In our last session, last Lord's Day, we covered the promise we're making as individuals and as a church membership to pursue a good reputation in every aspect of life as we take our gospel into the public arena.

We also dealt with the promise to bless our community through personal labor, talent, investment and skill – and we talked about the fact that our diligent and creative and excellent work ethic and even volunteerism, actually reflects to our community the diligence and creativity and excellence of God’s character.

Today, I want to cover more territory.

Going public with our Christianity, means that we are making a commitment pray for our political leaders and all who are in authority over us; demonstrating humility and concern for their well-being as we respect the guidelines of just law.

Let’s work this mouthful of a commitment. We are committed to obeying the law of the land, no matter what country you live in, unless that law requires you to violate and disobey the gospel and the moral law of God, you obey (Acts chapter 4 and 5 find the Apostolic community being forbidden by their authorities to preach in the name of Jesus – and they responded, with as much respect and clarity as they could, *“we must obey God rather than man.”*)

Obviously, it’s a wonderful thing to live in a country that respects the word of God and the moral law of God – and if it doesn’t, Christians suffer because of it as they obey the law of God.

For the most part, world history is the story of the persecution of true believers. Which is why the Apostle Peter wrote to those suffering for the gospel these words, *“But if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”*

In other words, if suffering takes place because you bear the name Christian – because you live up to the name Christian – because you demonstrate the convictions of your Christianity, Peter says that your suffering isn’t a badge of shame, but a badge of honor (*I Peter 4:16*).

It would do every Christian well to study a little church history. Take the Foundations Class on Church History for a year and find out what our forefathers dealt with.

Go back into early church history and you’ll discover that these early Christians in Rome effectively stood against the very underpinnings of Rome’s morality.

They would openly disobey one of the ancient Twelve Tables of Roman Law that decreed – and I

quote – deformed infants shall be killed. Even the educated Roman tutor of Caesars named Seneca who lived during the time of the Apostles, defended infanticide by writing, “We drown children who at birth are weak and abnormal.” This has been through around the world – it’s true in other cultures, including India, China, Japan, the Brazilian jungles and even among the Eskimos.ⁱⁱⁱ

Obviously, the value of human life is raised by the presence of the Gospel and in its absence, human life becomes nearly worthless.

I found it interesting to discover in my study that in the latter part of the second century, a church leader named Clement from Alexandria wrote that the Roman government and its citizens were known for saving and protecting young birds and other animals while lacking any moral regard about abandoning or aborting their own children.^{iv}

In fact, Plato argued that it was the right of the city-state to have a woman submit to an abortion so that the state would not become too populated. Aristotle argued the same thing; which effectively created an industry around abortion.

Church history is merely repeating itself, because in 379 A.D. church leaders denounced the practice of selling aborted bodies to the manufacturers of beauty cream.^v

God’s laws and the gospel regarding the value of human life – preborn and newly born – including the command not to murder – meant that the Christian was at odds with what just so happened to be a way of life in Rome.

Another major issue where Christians were seen as culturally out of step was in regards to marital and sexual purity. It was simply the norm to have open marriages where legal wives were for producing family heirs and adulterous affairs were for everything else.

Another issue that grated on the Roman citizens was the Christians view of Gladiatorial games. The Christians would have nothing to do with them, which effectively ended up hurting ticket sales and casting guilt upon the highest reaches of their political world.

Hundreds of thousands of slaves, captured enemy soldiers, criminals, political enemies were killed by wild beasts and by one another.

When the Emperor Trajan opened the new Colosseum in Rome in 80 A.D. so many wild animals and human gladiators died, the historians

noted that the sands of the arena were saturated with blood.

A later emperor held gladiator games for four months straight – and every day it was a sellout crowd – and in the end, 10,000 gladiators had been involved.

And the Christians absence from it all was well known.

One Roman leader complained to a church leader, “You do not go to our shows; you take no part in our processions or parades; you shrink in horror from our sacred gladiatorial games.”^{vi}

In other words, how dare you . . . do you think you’re more righteous or better than we are – your absence and your refusal to approve is an accusation that we are wrong.

And listen – back in Rome and here in America – don’t dare insinuate that someone is doing something wrong, much less sinning – you will invite their anger.

And this growing sect that bore the name Cristiani, was gathering a storm of resentment . . . and then anger . . . and ultimately hatred.

The Emperor Nero would soon cover Christians with tar and tie them to poles and set them on fire to serve as lighting for his garden parties.

One emperor so vengefully attempted to wipe Christianity out that he demanded every church leader imprisoned and every letter of scripture burned.

One historian said that the dungeons were so filled with elders and deacons that no room was available for true criminals.^{vii}

And what would the Spirit of God say to these Christians – then and now?

Would the Apostle’s say something like, “Just hang on – eventually your community will come around and be reasonable and appreciate your morals and your testimony and vindicate who you are?”

Yes, it *is* true that time does vindicate some things.

Today, the Roman empire is dead and the church is still alive, right? Today, people name their sons Paul and they name their dogs Nero. You have to love that kind of vindication.

But that’s not what the Apostles told the church to do, was it – to complain and petition and argue and disagree and ultimately disobey everything and everything because, after all, you belong to the

Emperor of Heaven and Nero is only a puppet of the devil.

That’ll preach, right? Instead they wrote sacred instructions like **Titus 3:1**, Paul writes, remind these Cretan believers ***to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient.***

In other words, unless these rulers try to make you personally disobey God, until then you obey their laws. Which is another way of saying, the Christian isn’t above the law. And that New Testament principle is true to this day.

Even the most irritating of laws – for instance;

- you don’t need to pray about meeting city codes for your business or building project;
- you don’t need to pray about getting your car inspected – maybe you’re praying *while* your car is getting inspected;
- you don’t need to pray about paying your employees minimum wage;
- you don’t need to pray about getting your license renewed; trust me, I’m actually thinking about praying over that one.

The other day I had to show my driver’s license at the bank – and as I stood there waiting, I looked at it – I had just gotten it renewed last year and I discovered that they’d made a mistake and typed in the date of renewal for this year . . . which meant my license was only good for 1 year. I’ve got to go back to the DMV and stand in line for 7 days and go through the process all over again.

And I don’t even get to pray about it. *Be subject to rulers and to the DMV.*

But it’s much more than some kind of teeth clenching, jaw grinding obedience. Paul adds this thought in **1 Timothy chapter 2**, ***First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayer, petitions and thanksgiving, be made on behalf of all men; for kings and all who are in authority.***

Timothy, I want you to thank God for your authorities; I want you to thank God for whatever you can about these Roman politicians . . . and pray for all of them – ultimately, pray for their salvation.

Listen, one of the remarkable distinctives about Christianity is our attitude toward those in authority over us

But wait a minute.

- a madman is on the throne;

- society is depraved;
- sexual norms were out the window and even the emperor is bi-sexual;
- adultery, idolatry, abortion, prostitution, drug addiction are all taking place under legal protection.

If there was anybody who would have no desire to thank God for any of his leaders; if there was ever a church that could be let off the hook in terms of submitting to authority – it would be Paul and these early Christians.

But just study the implications of this text and others and what happened in church history;

- rather than mount an insurrection to unseat Nero;
- the church just started raising families and adopting the unwanted children;
- the church started showing the world marital harmony and fidelity;
- the church began to show honor where honor was due and a willingness to submit to their authority *unless* that authority demanded they sin –
- but then the Christian submitted, to the shock of their world, by becoming submissive even to the verdict of death and calmly walking into that same arena and dying for *their* faith.

They lived up to their name – the name of their Messiah who submitted to his earthly authorities verdict and He died for *the* faith.

Let's bring it down for a moment . . . what's your attitude toward those authorities that God has placed in your life?

- How respectful are you to your parents?
- To your elders and pastors?
- How submissive are you to your teachers – even your most demanding professors? That's a long way of saying, "Are you doing your homework?" That's showing respect for your authority.
- How about toward your supervisor on the job? Oh, you don't know how mean and wicked my supervisor is? Oh? Is he a little like Nero?
- What's your attitude to your town council and the city codes? I know a pastor who built a home and put up a handrail at his

front porch to comply with city codes and then after the inspector left, he took down the handrail.

I know of another pastor and his church who paid quite a price to meet building codes – antagonistic and unrealistic though they were:

I read the true story of a large church that searched for quite a while and finally found and bought a 130 acre mountain just off a major freeway in California.

After months of designing their church facilities, things got complicated. The neighbors complained to the town council, and won their argument, that the church shouldn't be able to build on top of the mountain because it would block their view. So the building project was totally redesigned for the side of the mountain.

Soon after, an endangered bird known as the California Black Tailed Gnat Catcher – a pair of them were discovered to nest on that mountain, the church was allowed to build only on 25 acres. The other 105 acres was dedicated to the birds. Then the church was told that heavy construction could not take place on the mountain during the Gnat Catcher breeding season, which lasted 7 months between February and August – evidently, the noise of heavy construction could ruin their romantic life. So the church willingly waited until the end of breeding season –but in the interim, inspectors found a small bush called the coastal sage on the property. Once again, they were forbidden to build wherever that bush grew.

Then the church was required to pay \$120,000 for a two acre dig – because construction workers uncovered a pottery shard along with a rock believed to have been blackened by a cooking fire started by Indians. That acreage finally had to be covered with a special soil – at an additional cost of \$10,000 dollars.

Finally the buildings were completed. But then the parking lot created even more problems because government officials cited "light pollution" from so many parking lot lights. They demanded that the church light poles be lowered from the normal 20 feet to 3 feet, which, the pastor countered, "was fine so long as your cars were only 6 inches high."

This news release went on and on and on. The church was delayed more than 10 years because of these issues, and the project cost 18 million dollars more, by the time they finished and moved in.

What do we do? Submit . . . and pray for them.

With that in mind, let me cover quickly another commitment we effectively make to our community as we wear the name ‘Christian’.

We promise to pay taxes and every debt in a timely manner; fulfilling verbal, legal and financial commitments.

That’s a long way of saying we won’t steal, cheat or stick it to the government or our clients if we can somehow get away with it. We actually pay our taxes.

The first real threat to government forced revenue in American history took place in 1794 when the infamous Whiskey Rebellion broke out. Pennsylvania farmers mostly became angry on being taxed on their whiskey and they burned tax collectors homes down. It took Congress to put down the revolt by military force.

Taxes were a repeated issue of conflict even through the Civil War when the practice required that anybody who made more than \$800 dollars a year oughtta pay taxes.

Then in 1862, Congress created the Internal Revenue Service – and that solved everything.

One thing has remained constant, Benjamin Franklin famously quoted in 1789, “nothing is certain, except death and taxes.”

And you might be tempted to think that since a Christian is a citizen of heaven, he gets a free pass on paying taxes as a citizen of his country.

And if anybody had the right to find a loophole, it would have been the Apostle Paul. And yet he writes to the Roman believers in *chapter 13, You also pay taxes . . . verse 6; render to all what is due them, tax to whom tax is due.*

He’s talking about believers paying taxes to Rome . . . with Nero on the throne. Paul clarifies – I’m sure much to the surprise and dismay to many a Christian – that Christians aren’t exempt, even though they belong ultimately to a heavenly empire.

So what that means is that in a few weeks or months when you get your W-2 in the mail, you don’t need to add to your prayer list, “Pray about paying my taxes.” You don’t need to get your friends to pray with you and for you to get the Lord’s leading.

No, here it is. Paying taxes isn’t an option – it’s a command. And listen, could anyone today be more absolutely unique and distinctive in their testimony

than delighting in honoring God by paying every single cent owed in taxes. I mean, how different is that?! And that goes for every financial commitment, by the way.

A Christian’s word should matter; a handshake oughtta stand for something. A verbal agreement to the Christian is as binding as a 10 page contract.

Paul was in a culture saturated with stealing and lying and cheating. In fact, it was such a pervasive problem that he wrote specifically to the Ephesian believers *to put away falsehood and to tell the truth and to steal no longer (Ephesians 4: verses 25 & 28).*

The word for steal is the Greek word, *klepto* which gives us our word *kleptomaniac*. That sounds like *every* culture and *every* generation. And it certainly sounds like ours!

Sixteen million dollars is stolen from retailers by their own employees – listen – 16 million dollars is stolen from retailers by their own employees every single day.^{viii}

An unbelieving culture is known for lying and stealing and cheating and violating contracts and fudging on expense accounts and the Apostle Paul reveals that one of the most compelling ways to demonstrate the gospel to our community is to tell the truth and keep our hands in our own pockets.

One of the most compelling characteristics of Christianity is honesty.

Warren Wiersbe illustrated this commitment to the importance of integrity and honesty when he retold an event that took place in New York. The year was 1805, and a number of Indian chiefs and warriors met in council at Buffalo Creek, New York, to hear a gospel message delivered by a Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society.

After the sermon was over, a response was delivered to the missionaries by Red Jacket, one of the leading chiefs. He said, “We are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this same town. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them all. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them hones and less likely to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said.”^{ix}

What difference does your nametag make to you? What does it mean to you to carry around the name, ‘Christian’? And what does it really say to your world?

Is it a cheap little paper nametag you put on when you show up at places like a job interview or a family reunion? It is something you wear on Sunday, but it seems to peel off under the pressure of Monday through Friday? Or is it a name, deeply, permanently, obviously embroidered into the fabric of your life?

Let's go public with our Christianity. How? Doing something dramatic . . . dynamic . . . earth shaking?

No . . . just ordinary people demonstrating a remarkable commitment to pray for those in authority over them; to graciously follow the law; to pay their taxes and keep their word.

And in so doing, demonstrate the undeniable characteristics of a changed life . . . someone who is committed to living up to their name – Christian.

A true, genuine, Christ honoring, Christian.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/10/2016 by Stephen Davey
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i R. Kent Hughes, Acts: The Church Afire (Crossway, 1996), p. 159

ii Eckhard J. Schnabel, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts (Zondervan, 2012), p. 524

iii Alvin J. Schmidt, How Christianity Changed the World (Zondervan, 2004), p. 48

iv Ibid, p. 53

v Ibid, p. 59

vi Ibid, p. 63

vii Ibid, p. 30

viii R. Kent Hughes, Ephesians (Crossway, 1990), p. 152

ix Quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter (Zondervan, 2010), p. 173