

# Wings

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*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."  
Isaiah 40:31*



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## Not Protestant, Catholic, nor Jew

This categorization of dominant religious traditions in our culture may be historically accurate, but it ignores the most basic historical fact of all — the final prayer of mankind's Savior.

"So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Ac. 11:26).

"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter" (1 Pet. 4:16).

In earlier generations, religious affiliation in America was generally categorized as Protestant, Catholic, or Jew. These labels reflected the historical development of religious experience in America, and covered the vast majority of the population. These labels were a means of reducing hundreds of religious factions into a more manageable scheme. (In today's pluralistic society, of course, we would have to add Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Wiccans, atheists, and Elvis worshippers to the list. But let's not complicate matters further.)

Gospel preachers back in those days would often remind us that we are not Protestants, Catholics, nor Jews, but just Christians. As our opening texts indicate, in the early days of Christianity, the

disciples of Christ were known by only one name: Christians. This simple name reflected a common allegiance to their resurrected Savior. All other distinctions became irrelevant. If people could be just "Christians" in the first century, why can't they be that today?

In fact, early Christianity could have very easily splintered into competing factions similar to modern denominationalism. The prejudices that had separated Jews and Gentiles for centuries threatened to split the church into Gentile and Jewish versions of the faith, but the apostles fought furiously—and successfully—to prevent that from happening. They insisted that Jews and Gentiles set aside their cultural biases in the interest of a real unity that allowed them to worship and associate with each other freely (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8-10; Eph. 2; etc.). It was the power of Christianity to unite people from such disparate backgrounds that caused the new religion to flourish as it did.

In the centuries since, believers have foolishly allowed their differences to crystallize into competing sects.

Some of these differences reflect cultural developments that continually evolve through the course of human history; most involve various distortions of the original teachings of Christ that either add to or detract from the source documents. Whatever the origin of the differences, the practical result is a sorry display of division that besmirches the name of the One who died for all of us.

Some argue that the appeal to be "just Christians" is an unrealistic fantasy that ignores two thousand years of rich history. On the contrary, it is the proponents of this modern mess that are ignoring history. In His last prayer before He died, Jesus prayed that His followers be united, even as He and His Father are united (Jn. 17:20-23). The failure of His followers to fulfill His wishes in this regard has been a dark stain on the history of the faith.

It is not arrogance or intolerance to reject these labels in favor of the simple name "Christian." Rather, it is a sign of respect for our Savior's dying wish. If His memory means anything to us, we will work to make His prayer a reality.

— David King