

Commentary: Isn't there some other name we can call ourselves?

July 29, 2025

During a three-day seminar for new Christians, during which we discussed why people stay away from Christianity, someone asked: "Isn't there some other name we can call ourselves? In so many places, 'Christian' is a bad word associated with bigots, self-righteous judgmental people, LGBTQ haters, demonstrators damning girls entering abortion clinics, and right-wing extremists. Can't we believe in Jesus, but not call ourselves Christians?"

Good question. I know several people who love Jesus but were burned by un-Christlike Christians. Or as the man above, they don't want to be bundled together with such bad examples of Jesus' message.

After the seminar, that question wouldn't leave me. I could understand and sympathize with that person, but I don't know of a better name.

Like Christ or not

The word "Christian" means "a follower of" (Greek) or "belonging to" (Latin) Christ. That pretty much encapsulates who we are and what we do.

I know of many sincere Christians doing what they can to be examples of God's love in their communities. But, yes, there are also those under the Christian umbrella who do some un-Christlike things.

Today's news media, TV and movies take every opportunity to let me know about the failings of Christianity, its members and some of its leaders.

Recently, there has been an abundance of programs, podcasts and articles criticizing some church, pastor, heresy, doctrine or anything else a critical eye can dissect and pick apart.

Some feel duty-bound to expose any and every flaw and to lead misled flocks back to the one true faith—theirs. Those people need to roll up their sleeves, get out, lead the way and show us how to win the world with the love of God.

Of course, it would have been great if Christians throughout the centuries all had been living examples of Jesus' love and compassion, as many were, but many weren't.

If we are honest with ourselves, you and I also have failed regularly to be the living examples of Jesus' love we should be, but we can change that right now.

Now is the time

Now is the day.

It does us no good to slog through all the many failings of past Christians or bog down in the mire of the present church's failings. It's useless to dwell on how they or we should have done differently. They and we didn't do it differently, and it's done, past, kaput, over.

Refuse to let the cobwebs of yesterday's failings cling to today. Let's brush them aside and renew our dedication to be instruments of Christ's love today. Don't look at where we were, but to where we are going.

If you are sitting in your home wondering why today's Christianity is in the state it's in, why not get out and be the one to set the example and be that force for good. Be the change you want to see. Be the courage you want to see. Be the love you want to see.

A poem

Christ's Baton has been handed to me.

It's now my turn.

It's now my turn to not criticize the way things were done,
but be the change, and live the love I want to see.

It's now my turn not to judge and criticize other Christians,
But simply be a living sample of Christ's love.

It's now my turn not to badmouth the church I was in,
But promote unity, harmony and understanding among us.

It's now my turn to not mistreat others like I had been,
but jump in with kindness, compassion and encouragement.

It's now my turn not to leave someone alone, without hope,
But offer them my friendship and companionship.

It's now my turn not to withhold and keep for myself,
But freely give what God has given to me.

It's now my turn not to lash out in anger as someone did to me,
But be patient, kind and give the benefit of doubt.

It's now my turn not to make mistakes in my relationships,
But sow love that covers a multitude of sins.

It's now my turn not to leave someone in need as I had been,
But to give to the least of these as unto the Lord.

It's now my turn not to copy the negative attitudes around me,
But be a positive light in this negative world.

It's now my turn to take the bad, the ugly, the perishing,
And transform them into the good, the beautiful, the flourishing.

Christ's baton has been handed to me.

It's now my turn.

How will I run the race set before me?

"Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Robert Ritzenhein, after retiring from full-time missionary service, lives in Japan, organizing Christian programs for area rest homes, and is the yearly Santa at his city's hospitals. The views expressed in this opinion article are those of the author.