

The Name of the Church that Jesus Built

(by Bob Pulliam)

When the identity of any one, or any thing, is under consideration, there is a universal tendency to start with it's "name". Names are convenient labels that identify that to which they are attached. When the name is spoken, all that the hearer identifies with that name is brought to mind. Names may be given due to an appearance, a function, a whim, etc... This lesson will consider the identity of the true church from the standpoint of the name which identifies it.

There Is a Great Deal in a Name...

Names are meaningful, along with our attitudes toward them. It has been said, "There is nothing in a name. After all, `A rose by any other name would smell just a sweet.'" On the other hand, Shakespeare did not have calling one's lover a "sow" either. Ask your spouse how he or she would like a dozen weeds for their anniversary, and see if the response is quite the same as for roses. There is no comparison between the famous line about a rose's name, and the name of the church. The name of the church attaches ownership, whereas the name rose is,... well... just a name.

If there is nothing in a name, then we could call the church anything we wanted. There are all kinds of people in a church, so we could just call it "The Good, the Bad, and the Evil Church". If we wanted to be non-committal on the matter, we could call it "The First Generic No-Name Church". How about "Hell Avoidance Seminar Corporation". And then there is "Satan's Worst Nightmare Club". One might snicker at these as being totally outlandish, but I've seen some just as bad out in the real world.

As much as the world might insist otherwise, words do mean something, and God has designated the proper terminology for His church.

The Church's "Name" is a Designation of Ownership...

As was previously noted, the church is identified by her ownership, rather than a simple name attachment. When the Bible speaks of the church, it does so by designation of her owner. For example, church of Christ is the church that belongs to Christ. And church of God is the church that belongs to God. You might note that the word "church" is never capitalized in scripture, because it is never used as a proper name. Instead it is a designation that assigns ownership.

When we speak of the "church of Christ", there is no reference to a denomination for two reasons. First, the designation is not a proper name. It is a descriptive phrase that identifies ownership. Second, this designation is given by God. It is not a naming to distinguish it from an original, or others like it. It identifies it by ownership. When the New Testament is consulted, one finds that there was no need to create a proper name to distinguish it from other churches. There was only one church, and it was simply called in accordance with what it was...

The New Testament Pattern...

Let's look at a few examples of Use. In Romans 16:16, the apostle Paul wrote, "the churches of Christ salute you". He had been traveling through Asia Minor (modern Turkey),

and the churches had sent greetings. He simply passed that on by a general reference to all of them. Was it the Church of Christ denomination? No. It was those local churches that were governed by the law of Christ, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and therefore belonged to Christ, who sent greetings. When Paul wrote to Corinth, he addressed his epistle to "the church of God, which is at Corinth" (I Cor 1:2). Now this was the Church of God denomination, wasn't it? No... I know we have that today, but such did not exist at that time. The church at Corinth is being described as the church that belongs to God. Such might better be seen in this statement by Paul to Timothy: "the house of God, which is the church of the living God..." (I Tim 3:15).

Conclusion...

The church that Jesus built was designated by her owner: Jesus, or God. To call her by any other name is to remove the ownership so vital to her existence. This first identifying factor removes many modern churches from any possible connection with the true church that Jesus built. Just look at their names. While they may have something to do with some topic in the Bible, they are not what you find used of the first century church when you read your New Testament.

Are you a member of the "church of Christ", or "church of God". If your answer is no, then you are saying more than you realize!