

STUDIES IN THE BIBLE



The Church — Its Names And Unity

Lesson 25

In our state of religious confusion the nature of the church mentioned in the New Testament is apt to be obscured. In this and the following two lessons we shall seek to discover what the primitive church was like. Our concern is not with present day denominations, but with the divine body described in the Bible.

Names Of The Church

All things of value have names. Although some would say that names are unimportant, we can easily see that this is not true. Can you imagine a husband thinking it unimportant that his wife would wear another's name? The Lord is just as vitally concerned with the titles of His church and His people.

The names by which the body of Christ is called are descriptive terms rather than proper names. We discover several such expressions applied to that body. The most common is "the church", an expression derived from a Greek word meaning "the called out". The church in the New Testament sense is composed of those who have been "called out" of the world of sin to become the people of God. The term is used in several ways — (1) in the universal sense to apply to all of the saved people throughout the world; (2) in the congregational sense to refer to a group of disciples working together in a congregation; (3) to an assembly of Christians called together for worship.

"Church" is often used without any additional identifying phrases. Sometimes, however, other expressions are added to more completely describe it. Thus we read, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves . . . to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28.) Since Christ purchased the church with His blood, "God" evidently refers here to God, the Son, or Jesus Christ. The word "God" is a term of deity and applies to the Son as well as to the Father. "Church of God" is used several times in the Scriptures.



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In Romans 16:16 we read, "The churches of Christ salute you." The plural is used since a number of congregations are referred to. That the church belongs to Christ we further know since He declared, "And upon this rock I will build my church." (Matt. 16:18.) Again, the church is His body. "Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular." (I Cor. 12:27.) In Ephesians 5:22, 23 Paul shows that the church is married to Christ as a wife is married to her husband. When possession is shown the church should wear His name as the wife wears the name of her husband. The glory and honor belong to the Son of God, not a religious teacher or reformer, regardless of how great he may be.

Other phrases designating the church include (1) the church of the firstborn (Heb. 12:23); (2) the kingdom (Heb. 12:28); (3) the way (Acts 19:9, 23); (4) the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

Terms Applied To Disciples

Two expressions identifying the early followers of Christ are found in Acts 11:26. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." A "disciple" is a follower. All who follow Jesus are His disciples. The term Christian became the name worn by these people. As the name indicates (Christ—ian) a Christian is a disciple of Christ. Thus Peter declares, "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed." (I Peter 4:16.) Never do we read of Peterite Christians or Paulite Christians. Neither today is the Lord pleased with denominational prefixes which are added to His name.

Disciples are also called saints. "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints." (Rom. 1:7.) "Saint" means "holy one" and since all Christians are to be holy, all are therefore saints. Canonization by a religious organization is not necessary. Other expressions applied to God's chosen are brethren (Col. 1:2), priests (I Peter 2:5, 9), and heirs (Rom. 8:17).

Unity Of The Body

The undivided nature of the church is expressed by Paul in Ephesians 4:3-6. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." The many bodies, many faiths, and many baptisms of our day were unknown in the first century. The prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17 was that His disciples might be as united as were He and the Father. The blessing of unity had been recognized many years before by David when he declared, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1.)



Yet even in apostolic times efforts were made to divide the church. Paul wrote the Corinthians, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you . . . that there are con-

tentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (I Cor. 1:10-13.) This unfortunate division came because some were following and wearing the names of men rather than Christ. If we were to follow any man, who could be greater than Paul? Yet Paul denounces the wearing of his name. Much religious division could be removed if all human denominational names were discarded in favor of those expressions found in God's word.

Likewise unknown in the primitive church were the denominational organizations and creeds which serve to perpetuate division today. The early Christians maintained unity because they were content to accept only those teachings which have been revealed to us in the New Testament. May we too strive for religious unity by letting Christ be our only creed and the Bible our only guidebook.

"Seek and Ye Shall Find"

In the blanks write the term applied to the church in each scripture:

1. I Cor. 11:22
2. Rom. 16:16
3. Acts 20:28
4. Col. 1:18
5. I Tim. 3:15

Answer each question:

1. Where were the disciples first called Christians? (Acts 11:26.)
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2. Whom did Paul almost persuade to become a Christian? (Acts 26:28.)
.....
3. What did Paul call the Christians in Ephesus to whom he addressed his letter? (Eph. 1:1.)
4. With whom does Paul say Christians are joint-heirs? (Rom. 8:17.)
.....
5. For whom does John say Christians ought to lay down their lives? (I John 3:16.)

Read I Corinthians 1:10-17. Write true or false before each statement:

- 1. Paul was glad that some at Corinth were saying they were of Paul.
- 2. Crispus was the only one personally baptized by Paul.
- 3. Those of the household of Chloe had told Paul that there were contentions at Corinth.
- 4. Some were following Apollos.
- 5. Paul entreated them to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Read John 17 (Christ's prayer for unity). In each blank write the verse in which that statement is found:

- 1. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."
- 2. "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."
- 3. "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."
- 4. "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are."
- 5. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."
- 6. "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me."
- 7. "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee."
- 8. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."
- 9. "And the glory which thou gavest me have I given them; that they may be one, even as we are one."
- 10. "Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee."

Name Grade

Address Date

City By