

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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The Names of the New Testament Church

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Bible students are aware that there is not just one name given in the New Testament to identify the church. While there is only one church, New Testament writers employ different phrases when speaking of the spiritual body of Christ.

The word “church” itself is a collective noun identifying a group of people who have been “called out.” These people belong to God, so in Corinth, these saints are identified by Paul as “*the church of God*” (*I Corinthians 1:1*). Saints, in a collective sense at various localities, are also described as “*the churches of Christ*” (*Romans 16:16*). Why? They belong to Christ. Because the people who belong to God through Christ occupy a preeminent relationship with Him, they are also described as “*the church of the firstborn*” (*Hebrews 12:23*).

On occasions, the New Testament writers identify the church by emphasizing “locality.” The locality might be a city, as when John wrote to “the church in Ephesus,” “the church in Smyrna,” “the church in Pergamum,” the church in Thyatira,” the church in Sardis,” the church in Philadelphia, and the church in Laodicea” (*Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18, 3:1, 7, 14*). Or the locality

might emphasize a “region” as when Paul wrote to “the churches of Galatia” (*Galatians 1:2, cf. Acts 9:31*).

The church is therefore identified by name in the New Testament emphasizing a group’s relationship with Deity, its locality, are a combination of both: “the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*I Thessalonians 1:1*).

While various names are found in the New Testament for the church, nowhere does one find a “Baptist,” “Presbyterian,” or “Methodist” church. The New Testament church came into existence with God emphasizing its relationship with Deity, not a man- John the Baptist, or a form of government – Presbytery, or a religious approach – Methodism. No Denomination existed in the first century. This is why we do not find one referred to in the New Testament. If a group is striving to be known as a church that is following the New Testament, you would think the group would at least want to be known by the ways God identifies His church. But this does not seem to be important to Denominations. If you are a member of a Denomination, you might want to investigate your Denomination’s teaching, and see what other

matters revealed by God your Denomination disregards.

Are you a member of a “church of Christ” whose preacher wants to change the name by which your local church is identified? The issue is not whether or not the descriptive name “church of Christ” is the only Scriptural name for God’s people. Could we not Scripturally identify ourselves here as “the church of the Pasadenians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” the church of God in Pasadena,” “the church in Parkview,” or “the church in Pasadena”?

The issue is “why” a preacher would want to encourage brethren to change a Scriptural identifying name. As Denominations disregard areas of God’s revealed ways, the preacher may be trying to ignore some of God’s revelation that the public connects with the group with the Scriptural name. Maybe they will visit us under another name more readily than associating the name with those forbidding instrumental music, demanding immersion in water for the remission of sins, or thinking they are the only ones going to Heaven. Beware, a name change will not eliminate prejudice, but compromising the truth will soften it!