

What's In a Name
by Alex Brown

In Shakespeare's famous play, *Romeo and Juliet*, the question is asked, "What's in a name?" (*Romeo and Juliet*; II, ii, 1-2) Many today in the religious world ask, "What's in a name," with regard to Christ and His church. They advocate to the world, as Juliet does to Romeo, "...throw your name away..." If such persons were to advocate the disposal of all human names from religion, then we, who are of the body of Christ, should lend all support and vigorously advocate the same. However, with regard to their admonition, it is not the name of some mere mortal they wish to do away with, but the name of the very Son of God.

The attitude of too many *brethren* today, with regard to evangelism and church growth, is to remove the name of Christ from His church. They believe the name of Christ to be offensive and controversial and thus, if one removes the name, one might remove the offense and bring more people into *their* church. While many have harkened to this new philosophy and changed the names of their churches to what they somehow perceive to be less menacing, less threatening names (*than that of the risen Lord !?!*) like, "Community Church," or "Believer's Fellowship," others have taken a more devious approach to appeal to the masses and thus increase their attendance; they have changed the doctrine inside *their* church, while leaving the name of Christ on the outside.

In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus told Peter that upon this rock (Greek – *πετρα* or "petra" i.e. the confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God), He would build His church. The use of the singular form of the word church indicates that there would only be one church, established and recognized by Jesus, and it was the keys to that church which were given to Peter by Jesus. We find the birth of the church that Jesus built recorded as it occurred in 33 A.D. on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) when Peter, standing with the other apostles (2:14), preached the Gospel (2:15-36), and bound, by authority of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 16:19, Acts 2:2-4), repentance and baptism as the admission requirements for one to gain entrance into Christ's church. We know that all

those who obey the Gospel (Romans 6:1-6) are baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 8:35-39, 22:16) and are added, by God Himself, to Christ's church (Acts 2:47, Col. 1:13-14).

One of the identifying marks of the church that Christ established is the name worn by the church. Many "churches" wear many names. Which name does and should, Christ's church wear? As a bride wears her husband's name in marriage so too should Christ's bride wear His name (Ephesians 5:22-33). Some ask, "Why does it matter?" It matters because the name the church wears identifies, 1) Who the church belongs to, 2) Who determines the doctrine preached and practiced therein, and 3) The authority and blessing of its Creator (John 1:3, Ephesians 3:8-12), Founder (Matthew 16:18), Purchaser (Acts 20:28), and Perfecter (Heb. 12:2).

The church that bears Christ's name is unique.

The Seven Scriptural Names For God's One New Testament Church

Acts 20:28 (ESV): Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the **church of God**, which he obtained with his own blood.

1 Corinthians 1:2 (ESV): To the **church of God** that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

1 Corinthians 10:32 (ESV): Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the **church of God**,

1 Corinthians 11:16 (ESV): If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the **churches of God**.

1 Corinthians 11:22 (ESV): What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the **church of God** and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

1 Corinthians 15:9 (ESV): For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the **church of God**.

2 Corinthians 1:1 (ESV): Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To **the church of God** that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:

Galatians 1:13 (ESV): For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the **church of God** violently and tried to destroy it.

1 Thessalonians 2:14 (ESV): For you, brothers, became imitators of the **churches of God in Christ Jesus** that are in Judea...

2 Thessalonians 1:4 (ESV): Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the **churches of God** for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

Romans 16:16 (ESV): Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the **churches of Christ** greet you.

Galatians 1:22 (ESV): And I was still unknown in person to the **churches of Judea that are in Christ**.

1 Timothy 3:5 (ESV): For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for **God's church**?

1 Timothy 3:15 (ESV): If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the **church of the living God**, a pillar and buttress of truth.

Hebrews 12:22-24 (ESV): But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to **the assembly* (church) of the firstborn** who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant...

These seven different names of God's group of saved people, His church (ek-klesia; Gk. "the called out"), or kingdom, as prophesied in Daniel 2, promised

in Matthew 16:13-19, and started as promised by Jesus when Peter bound belief, repentance, and baptism, as “terms of admittance” into God’s church, which is comprised of all those thus saved (Acts 2:22-47), are the **only** seven names, given by God, in Scripture, for that church (or “body” as it is also called by Christ) over which Jesus alone is Head (Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:18, 24), and of which, there is only **ONE**: See Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 10:17, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 2:16, Ephesians 4:4-6, Colossians 3:15. Those thus saved and in Christ (Romans 6:3-4, Galatians 3:25-27) were and are, called simply, Christians (Acts 11:26).

And it is far more than just the proper, God-ordained, and Biblical name, which makes a church, a Scripturally-organized, God-ordained, and Biblical church –that’s just the beginning. They must also worship completely in accordance with God’s will (John 4:23-24, 8:31-47, 17:6-17), not man’s (Matthew 15:7-9, Luke 6:46-49, Galatians 1:6-10, 2 John 6-11). They all taught, **and teach** the same God-given, apostle-recorded doctrine, with no additions, subtractions, or deletions. (Douglas E. Dingley; Evangelist; church of Christ (Romans 16:16) Cleveland, Oklahoma)

The Lord’s Church

- It recognizes and obeys Christ as it’s only Head (Ephesians 1:22-23).
- It recognizes and obeys worship practices that only Christ dictates (prayer – Acts 14:23, 1st Timothy 2:8, James 5:14; congregational a cappella singing – Ephesians 5:17-21, Colossians 3:16-17; the preaching of the Word – Acts 8:25, 1st Corinthians 15:1-11; giving – 1st Corinthians 16:1-2; and the participation of the Lord’s Supper each and every first day of the week – Acts 20:7, 1st Corinthians 11:18, 23-29).
- It recognizes and obeys the God given roles of men and women (1st Timothy 2:8-15, 1st Corinthians 14:33-38) as taught by Christ through His apostles (Galatians 1:11-12).
- It is shepherded by those who meet the qualifications Christ set forth (1st Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 5:1-9).

- It preaches and teaches the requirements for salvation that Christ laid down (Acts 2:38-47, Acts 22:16, Galatians 3:27).
- It preaches and teaches Christ's view of moral issues such as any form of sexual immorality, including pre-marital sex, adultery, and homosexuality (Matthew 19:9, 1st Corinthians 6:9-10, 1st Timothy 1:10, Galatians 5:21); as well as general immorality such as lying, stealing, drunkenness, abortion-murder, and etc... (Galatians 5:19-21, 1st Timothy 1:8-11, Romans 1:18-32, Proverbs 6:17-19).

Sadly there are some "churches" today that do not recognize the purpose of a name. They display the name of Christ on the front of their buildings and on their "church" letterhead, all the while refusing to acknowledge Christ as Creator, Founder, Purchaser and Perfecter. Rather than submitting to Christ and the authority given Him by God in all things (Matthew 28:18), they instead substitute their own will for God's, committing the same crime Jesus charged the Pharisees and Scribes with in Matthew 15:6b-9,

"...So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: " This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' " (ESV)

What many of these "churches" do not realize is that, while they might fool the unsuspecting human being with their clever "church name" deceit, they do not fool God. As my sister-in-law used to say to me, "if I get the name, I get the game;" so too is it with Christ's church. If a congregation is going to wear the name (church of Christ) then they had better be in the obedience game and make sure the congregation on the inside of the building matches the name on the outside of the building. Christ knows those who are His (John 10:14), and they are those who hear and obey only His voice and thus go to Heaven (John 10:27-28).

Those who do not wish to submit to Christ, by obeying His commands, following His instructions for worship, teaching His doctrine, and shepherding as He commands, need to acknowledge reality and, as Juliet would say, "...throw your name away..." They need to take the name of Christ off of *their* church

building, off of *their* church letterhead, and no longer call themselves Christians (Christ-ian; i.e. one who belongs to Christ). For any congregation who refuses to follow Christ in all of these areas, truly does not belong to Christ but only to Satan and themselves, and therefore has no earthly right to wear His heavenly Name!

One thing that has always puzzled me is this; if Christ's church is so old-fashioned and out-of-date so as to need constant updating in the areas of preaching, worship, roles etc..., and the methods of Christ's church (which both were and are established in the Bible under His authority) are so ineffective as to warrant change, then **why is it that so many insist on keeping the name of Christ when they obviously no longer want to be the "church of Christ?"**

Those who wish to change everything about Christ's church and yet keep the name are like those who want to go to Burger King and order a Big Mac or go to Starbucks to get a cup of Dunkin Donuts coffee. They are like brides who continuously commit adultery against their husbands yet seek to retain their married names and privileges (Jeremiah 3, Ephesians 5:22-33).

Christ does not tolerate those who take His Name in vain and who deceive others in His Name (Exodus 20:7, Deuteronomy 5:11, Psalm 139:20, Jeremiah 23:32, Micah 3:5-7, Revelation 2:12-16); thus "while it is still day," let us "examine ourselves" (2nd Corinthians 13:5) to ensure that we are in the faith. Let us make sure that the name we choose to wear to identify us as Christ's church (church of Christ; Romans 16:16) reflects the attitude, doctrine, and practices of those who make up *the Lord's, one, New Testament, church*.