

# The Bible versus the “Church of Christ”

## The Name And History Of The Church

### Introduction:

1. This series of lessons is investigating the claims of a pamphlet titled: “The Bible versus the ‘Church of Christ’.”
2. The first lesson dealt with fundamental teaching about the church – it is the spiritual body of Christ.
3. Furthermore, the church is not a denomination, nor is it made up of denominations.
4. This lesson will consider two other teachings about the church – its **name** and its **beginning**.

### I. Is the Name of the Church Important?

- A. **The Accusation:** *“The Church of Christ claims to reserve for itself the ONLY scriptural name for a New Testament church, although the term ‘church of Christ’ is found nowhere in the Bible.”*
1. It is claimed that the term “church of Christ” cannot be found in the New Testament.
  2. It is claimed that we believe and teach that the name “church of Christ” is the only scriptural name for a New Testament church.
- B. **The Response:** *The term “church of Christ” is not found in the New Testament.*
1. But, the term “churches of Christ” is! (Romans 16:16)
  2. The book of Romans was written by Paul from Corinth, around the year 58 AD.
    - a. He encouraged the Christians in Rome to salute one another with a holy kiss – that is, to warmly and in purity greet each other.
    - b. Then, he declared that the “churches of Christ” greet you.
    - c. This means that the other congregations Paul was in contact with sent their greetings to the church in Rome.
    - d. Some versions read, “All the churches of Christ salute you” – indicating the fellowship that exists among all congregations that make up the one body of Christ.
  3. Question: If many congregations are called “churches of Christ,” what is one congregation called?
  4. Answer: “Church of Christ” (cf. Revelation 1:4, 11; 2:1, 8, 12; etc.)
  5. It is worth noting that most churches who wear the name “church of Christ” designate themselves by their location.
    - a. Thus, the church of Christ that meets in the Whitehouse community is called the Whitehouse church of Christ.
    - b. This is a designation more than a name!
    - c. And, it is much different from the denominational practice of naming a church after a man, belief, or doctrine.
  6. Clearly, the designation “church of Christ” is scriptural and found in the NT.
- C. The term “church of Christ” is a scriptural name for a New Testament church, but it is NOT the only scriptural name.
1. Melton states: *“There is nothing particularly wrong with the term ‘Church of Christ,’ but it is wrong to insist that this is the ONLY scriptural name for the church when the term isn’t even found in the Bible!”*
  2. He is right that insistence upon this one name is wrong.
  3. However, he is wrong for claiming that we insist upon this one name ONLY.
    - a. In formal debate, this practice sometimes is called attacking a straw man.
    - b. The debater creates an argument that is easily defeated and then claims that it is the belief of his opponent.
    - c. As he soundly defeats that argument, it appears that he is soundly defeating his opponent.

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- d. In fact, he merely is fighting a straw man.
4. The Bible gives several different designations that are applied to the church.
  - a. **The church** Matthew 18:17; Acts 2:47
  - b. **The church in (location)** Acts 11:22; 13:1; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 16:1
  - c. **The church of God** Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22
  - d. **The churches of Christ** Romans 16:16
  - e. **The church of the living God** 1 Timothy 3:15
  - f. **The house of God** 1 Timothy 3:15
  - g. **The church of the firstborn** Hebrews 12:23
  - h. **The body** Ephesians 5:23
  - i. **The body of Christ** 1 Corinthians 12:27; Eph. 4:12
  - j. **The kingdom** Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 1:9
  - k. **The kingdom of God** Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31
  - l. **The kingdom of God’s Son** Colossians 1:13
  - m. **God’s husbandry (farm, field)** 1 Corinthians 3:9
  - n. **God’s building** 1 Corinthians 3:9
  - o. **The flock** 1 Peter 5:3
5. Because these names are scriptural, any of them is appropriate to use for the church.
  - a. However, just because a biblical name is used, it alone does not mean that the church is following the teachings of the Bible.
  - b. Many congregations who call themselves “churches of Christ” do not remain faithful to the Word of God.
6. The Bible does not specify only one name or title that is to be used for the church.
- D. However, there is importance in a name – especially in what we call ourselves and the body of Christ.
  1. Though men may claim, “There is nothing in a name;” names are important to God. {*Illustration: “Glory to Beelzebub, the prince of devils!”*}
    - a. In the Old Testament, specific names were used for God – to relate and describe His nature and relationship with man.
    - b. On several occasions, God changed the names of men and women, showing their importance (Gen. 17:5, 15-16, 19; 32:28; etc.)
    - c. In the New Testament, God was still concerned with names (Luke 1:13, 57-59, 60-64; 1:31; Matt. 1:21; John 1:42; etc.).
    - d. God prophesied that He would give a new name to His followers (Isaiah 56:5; 62:2; 65:15).
    - e. This name was the name “Christian” (Acts 11:26).
  2. If disciples were to wear the name of Christ, why should the church not wear that same name?
- E. Why do we wear the name “church of Christ?”
  1. It is a name that is scriptural.
  2. It is a name that honors the Savior, Jesus the Christ, the head of the church.
  3. It is a name that shows ownership.
  4. It is a name that describes who and what we are.
  5. It is a name that is not divisive or sectarian.
    - a. We must make sure that we do not use it in a denominational way.
    - b. **H. A. Dixon** – “...*We may describe God’s family in any way that is in harmony with divine revelation. ...Trouble ensues and error begins when men take one or more of these terms as the proper name of the called out.*”
    - c. **G. C. Brewer** – “*While we may use any or all these scriptural designations of the church according as our purpose demands or as our taste dictates,*

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*yet if we should exalt and set apart any one of them as the name of the church, we would be guilty of a serious error. We would be presumptuously supplementing the word of inspiration, for no inspired man ever gave any name to the church. ...To use the phrase ‘church of Christ’ as the name of the Lord’s body is not only to make it a sectarian designation; it is also to exclude the expression ‘church of God’ and all other scriptural terms that are applied to the people of the Lord.”*

- F. Finally, man-made names are not scriptural and not pleasing to God.
1. Melton writes that *“the Lord never specified a special name for the church... a specific name is never given to the church itself.”*
  2. However, that does not mean that we can call the church anything that we choose.
    - a. Would any denominational group call themselves the “church of Satan”?
    - b. In fact, if *“there is nothing particularly wrong with the term,”* why will they not wear the name “church of Christ”?
  3. Remember that the Jews divided themselves into sects with human names – Pharisee, Sadducee, Zealot, Herodian, Essene – none of which were pleasing to God (cf. Proverbs 6:14, 19; Acts 23).
  4. At Corinth, the church was divided into groups that wore human names, condemned by God (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:2, 5).
  5. Human names are wrong because...
    - a. They promote **division**.
    - b. They create **dishonor**.
      - i. Some names honor the names of men instead of God.
      - ii. Some names honor the methods of men instead of God.
  6. Some important quotations from religious leaders.
    - a. **Martin Luther** – *“I pray you to leave my name alone, and call not yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified for anyone. St. Paul (1 Cor. 1:13) would not that any should call themselves of Paul nor of Peter, but of Christ. How, then, does it befit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes, to give my name to the child of God? Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with them all; and let us call ourselves only Christians after Him from whom our doctrine comes.”*
    - b. **John Wesley** – *“Would to God that all party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world were forgot, that we might all agree to sit down together as humble, loving disciples at the feet of the common Master, to hear His word, to imbibe His spirit, and to transcribe His life into our own.”*
    - c. **Charles Spurgeon** – *“I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living. I hope they will soon be gone. I hope the Baptist name will soon perish; but let Christ’s name last forever.”*
    - d. **F. D. Srygley** – *“There is no Scriptural name in the New Testament for a denomination, as there is no denomination in the New Testament; and, if a denomination were to select a Scriptural name for itself, it would still be an unscriptural institution. I am more concerned about what is in the New Testament than I am for a name for a thing that is not there. ...Sectarianism, partyism, and all divisions are condemned in the New Testament.”*

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## II. When Did the Church Begin?

- A. **The Accusation:** *“These people believe that the true Church ceased to exist for about seventeen centuries, and that THEIR church has restored the true faith for today. This would mean that such great Christian men as John Wesley, Martin Luther, John Knox, and George Whitfield were not really members of the ‘true church’ because the ‘true church’ didn’t exist in their lifetime.”*
- Melton makes this accusation after quoting from two tracts.
    - “The church of Christ today is no more or no less than the New Testament church reproduced in doctrine and practice in this twentieth century”* (Haun).
    - The other stated the desire to be members of the *“original church that Christ built.”*
  - In neither of these quotations can the teaching be found that the true church ceased to exist for 1,700 years.
  - Melton builds another straw man and then proceeds to beat him severely.
- B. He argues from Matthew 16:18, *“The true church has existed since the day Jesus started it.”*
- He declares, *“There is absolutely NO SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT for this doctrine”* (that the true church ceased to exist for 1700 years).
  - We agree and have never taught any differently!
- C. **The Response:** *The Lord’s church began on the Day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus.*
- The church in **purpose** (Ephesians 3:8-12)
  - The church in **promise** (Genesis 12:1-3)
  - The church in **prophecy** (Isaiah 2:1-4; Daniel 2; Joel 2)
  - The church in **preparation** (Matthew 3:10-17)
  - The church in **perfection** (Acts 2)
  - The beginning of the kingdom is the beginning of the church.
    - They are different terms for the same institution (Matthew 16:18-19).
    - The kingdom was to come with power during the lifetime of those who heard Jesus (Mark 9:1).
    - They were to wait in Jerusalem for power (Luke 24:49).
    - The power was to come with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:9).
    - The Holy Spirit came with power in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:1-4).
    - Thus, the church of Christ was established and had its beginning on the Day of Pentecost.
    - From that day forward, those who obey the Gospel are added by the Lord to His church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47).
- D. However, there was a “falling away” from the truth of the Gospel of Christ.
- The Lord warned that men would drift from the faith (Acts 20:28-30; Gal. 1:6-9; Col. 2:8, 16-23; 2 Thes. 2; 1 Tim. 1:18ff; 4:1-8; 2 Tim. 2:14-19; 4:1-5; 1 John 4:2-3; etc.).
  - Indeed, it was not long before many congregations became vastly different from Jesus had established.
    - AD 30 - The church established
    - AD 120- The idea of “holy water” introduced
    - AD 140- The observance of Lent introduced
    - AD 150- The “monarchal bishop” was becoming common
    - AD 190- The Bishop of Rome claimed to be “universal bishop”
    - AD 200- A clear division between “clergy” and “laity”

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- g. AD 220- Sprinkling first used for baptism
  - h. AD 390- Auricular confession introduced
  - i. AD 431- Mary first called the “Mother of God”
  - j. AD 434- Leo I claimed the title of Pope
  - k. AD 450- Infant baptism widely accepted
  - l. AD 500- Worship of images or icons introduced
  - m. AD 606- Boniface III became the first “strong” Pope
  - n. AD 666- Instrumental music first approved for worship
  - o. AD 787- Doctrine of transubstantiation accepted
  - p. AD 869- Tradition deemed equally authoritative as Scripture
  - q. AD 1190 – Sale of indulgences first permitted
  - r. AD 1229 – The Bible forbidden to the laity
3. Though those who taught these doctrines and practiced these errors continued to call themselves Christians and the church, they were apostates from the faith.
- E. During this time, the true church continued to exist, but it was persecuted and oppressed.
- 1. God has always had a faithful remnant, though often small in number.
    - a. At the time of the Flood, only Noah and his family were saved (1 Pet 3:20).
    - b. During captivity, a faithful remnant was allowed to return (2 Chron. 30:6; Ezra 3:8; Isa. 1:9; 10:20-22; Micah 7:18-20).
    - c. Of the Jews, only a faithful few accepted Jesus as the Messiah (Rom. 9:27; 11:5).
    - d. At the beginning of the church, only a faithful few were obedient to the Gospel (Acts 2:37-41).
    - e. During persecution, only a few remained true to Christ (Rev. 12:17).
  - 2. This was true during the rise of religious error and in the history of the church until the present.
    - a. Initially, the Roman government was a persecutor of the true church.
    - b. Eventually, the apostate church (aligned with Rome) became a persecutor of the true church.
    - c. Those who sought to remain loyal to the Gospel were often labeled as heretics and killed.
    - d. So, in many cases, the true church was forced to go “underground.”
    - e. *“By families and by groups Christians who were concealing themselves from the executioners settled in the inaccessible oases of Northwest Arabia, concealed themselves in the almost waterless wadis of the Sinaitic Peninsula, fled into the chaotic cities of the Nile delta....”*
    - f. *“[T]hey emerged in the hinterland of Cyrenaika, on the island of Djerba near the Tunisian coast, and in the High and Lower Atlas mountains.”*
    - g. Both of the previous quotes are from Dr. Hans Grimm.
  - 3. There are numerous historical examples of this type of persecution.
    - a. Around AD 350, a merchant named Priscillianus began teaching the simple Gospel in the Pyrenees.
      - i. In AD 380, he and several other Christians were beheaded.
      - ii. However, centuries later there were congregations in France and Portugal who traced their roots to his work.
    - b. By the year 422, there was a sizable population of Christians located in the British Isles.
      - i. Germanus, a Catholic bishop, wrote that these Christians had rejected the doctrine of original sin and practiced the immersion of adults only.

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- ii. He also wrote that they did not recognize the authority of the Pope nor the hierarchy of the Roman Church.
- iii. They also refused to practice the ritualism of the Roman Church in their worship services.
- iv. When Britain was conquered by the Anglo-Saxons and then the Romans, most of these churches ceased to exist.
- v. However, they had been very evangelistic in their time, especially the Irish and Scottish congregations.
- vi. Thus, the pure Gospel had spread into Germany where one Christian named Kilian had made a note on his Greek copy of the book of Romans at chapter three – “Faith, hid in the heart, makes man just.”
- vii. This Kilian was murdered by order of the Duke of the Franks.
- viii. It was not until the eighth and ninth centuries that the Irish and then the Scottish churches began to be assimilated into the national (Roman Catholic) Church.
- ix. In fact, in the year 1390 in Celtic Hill Cliff in Wales, a building was built for the meeting of the church which contained a “great basin for immersion of adults in baptism upon confession of faith.”
- c. In AD 375, the church in Syria attempted to stand against false doctrine and the forming “state” church.
  - i. A widow named Kallinike issued a public protest against these errors.
  - ii. In her statement, she appealed only to the words and deeds of the apostle Paul
  - iii. As a result, she and her two sons were banished.
- d. Numerous other example could be given (see *Supplementary Lesson: “A Faithful Remnant”*).
- 4. Thus, even though it was severely persecuted, the Lord’s true church never ceased to exist.

## F. The Reformation Movement

- 1. Beginning in the 1300’s, there was a widespread movement to reform the apostate Catholic Church.
- 2. Several men worked diligently toward this goal.
  - a. John Wycliffe – *translated the Bible into English*
  - b. Martin Luther – *“Ninety-five Theses” in protest of Catholic errors*
  - c. John Calvin – *Formulate the doctrine that would be known as Calvinism*
- 3. They were called Protestants because they protested against corrupt Catholicism.
- 4. While they, and others like them, did much good, they were not concerned with restoring New Testament Christianity but reforming the Catholic Church.
- 5. Thus, this movement came to be known as the Protestant Reformation.
- 6. Even during this time, the Lord’s church continued to exist.
- 7. Sadly, it was as a part of this movement that nearly every denomination came into existence.
 

|    |                  |                 |             |      |
|----|------------------|-----------------|-------------|------|
| a. | Roman Catholic   | Boniface III    | Rome        | 606  |
| b. | Eastern Orthodox |                 |             | 1054 |
| c. | Lutheran         | Martin Luther   | Augsburg    | 1530 |
| d. | Episcopal        | King Henry VIII | England     | 1535 |
| e. | Presbyterian     | John Calvin     | Switzerland | 1535 |
| f. | Baptist          | John Smyth      | London      | 1607 |

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|    |                       |                    |                |      |
|----|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------|------|
| g. | American Baptist      | Roger Williams     | Providence     | 1639 |
| h. | Methodist             | John Wesley        | London         | 1729 |
| i. | Primitive Baptist     |                    | North Carolina | 1765 |
| j. | Freewill Baptist      | Benjamin Randall   | New Durham     | 1780 |
| k. | Mormon Church         | Joseph Smith       | Seneca, NY     | 1830 |
| l. | Seventh-Day Adventist | Ellen G. White     | Massachusetts  | 1846 |
| m. | Christian Church      |                    | Midway, KY     | 1859 |
| n. | Jehovah’s Witness     | Charles T. Russell | Pennsylvania   | 1874 |
| o. | Christian Science     | Mary Baker Eddy    | Boston, MA     | 1879 |
| p. | Pentecostal           |                    | Anderson, SC   | 1898 |
| q. | Assembly of God       |                    | Hot Springs    | 1914 |

## G. The Restoration Movement

1. As has happened throughout history, there were those who realized that God does not want a reformed denomination but a restored church.
2. They did not seek to create a new denomination, nor to reform an old one.
3. Instead, they desired to leave all denominationalism and practice simple and pure New Testament Christianity.
4. Those who led this movement of restoration did not found or begin the church of Christ.
5. In truth, they simply called people back to the Bible and the church that was established by Jesus and can be found in the New Testament.
6. Whenever and wherever men go astray from the Word of God, restoration is necessary.
  - a. Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-7)
  - b. Josiah (2 Kings 22:1-11)
  - c. David (1 Chronicles 3:3-10; 15:1-13)

## H. At the end of his argument on this topic, Melton revealed his denominational bias and lack of understanding of the Scriptures.

1. He wrote: *“All throughout church history, millions upon millions have entered into the spiritual body of believers by receiving Christ as their Lord and Saviour (Jn. 1:12; Rom. 10:13). If you have received Jesus Christ as your Saviour, then you are a member of the true church, no matter WHAT denomination you are associated with, and if you haven’t received Him, then you are NOT a member of the true church, regardless of how many religious groups you join. Salvation is not in a church; it’s in a PERSON – the Lord Jesus Christ.”*
2. John 1:12 states that to those who received Him, Jesus gave them the power to become children of God.
  - a. They did not become sons of God by receiving Jesus.
  - b. When they accepted Him as the Messiah, they had the power (authority, right) to become sons of God.
  - c. One does not become a child of God until he or she puts on the Lord in baptism (Galatians 3:26-27; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:17-18; Romans 8:14).
3. Romans 10:13 is not the entirety of God’s plan of salvation.
  - a. The Bible teaches plainly what one must do to “call upon the name of the Lord.”
  - b. It is more than just saying, “Lord, Lord” (Matthew 7:21).
  - c. It requires obedience – repentance and baptism (Acts 2:21, 37-38).
  - d. It is not accomplished until baptism (Acts 22:16).
  - e. It includes membership in the church (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:41, 47).
4. As noted previously, when one obeys the Gospel of Christ, he or she is added by the Lord to the one, true church – the spiritual body of Christ.

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5. However, that body is not a denomination, nor is it made up of denominations!
6. Salvation is in a PERSON who is HEAD of a BODY!
  1. One cannot have the head without being part of the body!
  2. One cannot have Christ without being a part of His church.
7. Salvation is not in a denomination; but, it is found in Lord’s church (Eph. 5:23; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 15:24; Phil. 3:20; etc.).

## Conclusion:

1. The name of the church is important – it ought to be scriptural, descriptive and God-honoring.
2. However, the Bible does not command – and members of the church of Christ do not teach – one, and only one, specific name for the Lord’s body.
3. Furthermore, we have never claimed that the Lord’s church ceased to exist for 1700 years.
4. Instead, we agree with the Lord’s declaration that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against” His church.
5. Again, we do not call people to join “our denomination;” instead, we beg men to leave all denominationalism and obey the simple teaching of the New Testament.
6. Then, the Lord will add to His church those who are being saved (Acts 2:47).
7. Are you a member of the Lord’s one, true church?