

THE NAME CHURCH OF GOD

In these modern times, people are members of a number of churches which go by various names such as Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and so on. The purpose of this booklet is to show by Scripture, the name of the church that should be used by Christians, who are the followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

To begin, read I Corinthians 15:9: ***“For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”*** Now read what Paul says in Galatians 1:13: ***“For ye have heard of my conversations in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it.”*** In both these instances, Paul refers to the assembly of Christians as “the Church of God”. There is obvious remorse from Paul in his persecution of the church back when he still followed the teachings of the Pharisee sect. He had even consented to the death of Stephen, one of the first recorded Christian martyrs – see Acts 8:1 to 3 and 9:1, 2.

When Paul was still known as Saul, he was a zealous Pharisee and was determined to annihilate the Church of God. But through his experience of the vision on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), Paul (Saul) became converted to the message of the Christ, and he became just as zealous in the cause of Christianity as he had been as a Pharisee. In II Corinthians 1:1, we have Paul speaking to a single assembly: ***“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother unto the church of God which is at Corinth.”*** From this text, we read of Paul mentioning one congregation, for there was only one congregation in the city of Corinth at that time, and which Paul had started. He was not implying that the official name of the church was to be called after the city, such as the "Church of God at Corinth" or the "Corinthian Church of God" or in any other way incorporate the name "Corinth" with the Church title. Paul was simply giving the name of the city to specify the location of that specific Church of God that he was writing to. This is quite clear from the wording of the text: *"Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth."*

Now read a letter from Paul to a different church: ***“For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.”*** I Thessalonians 2:14. Paul speaks to the Greeks of Thessalonica stating he knows that they, too, on becoming brethren with the Church of God in Judaea have suffered similar persecution by their own countrymen for the truths of God even as their Christian brethren of Jewish descent in Judaea had been persecuted by their own countrymen for their belief in the Christ Jesus. This text is specifically mentioned to show that the term “Church of God” was used in Judaea, demonstrating it was a term used in various regions for God's true Church.

There is only one church name or title spoken of in the New Testament for the assemblies of the Christ followers, or Christians. It is the "Church of God" which is "the house of God". Read from the Old Testament Psalms 92:13: ***“Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.”*** This is a beautiful verse for the saints of God to know, as it is making reference to those that shall take their stand for the word of God, and shall be planted with those of like faith in the courts of God in the Kingdom to come.

Further evidence of the Church's appellation is found in II Thessalonians 1:3 to 4: ***“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your***

patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure." There is only one church name that the Christians refer to themselves as belonging.

As there was a designated name for the assemblies of God, so there was also a name given to the individual members. That designated name, "Christian", is quoted in three different places in the New Testament by Paul, Peter and even by Herod Agrippa. There is no indication that the called out ones of God will use hyphenated or prefixed names attached to their appellation. They will bear that single designation "Christian" and if they truly be of God, they will be proud to be known as belonging to the Church of God and not by any other denominational name. The title is in reference to them on having been "called out" – I Corinthians 1:2a: ***"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, try them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints..."***

Many church denominations have been established by individual men in a short period of time, while others were established over an extended period of time by a number of individuals contributing to its formation. There are many denominations whose members can describe themselves with a hyphenated name such as Mennonite-Christian, Catholic-Christian, Anglican-Christian, Lutheran-Christian and so on. In most cases followers describe themselves without the appellation of "Christian" (eg. Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, etc). In reality, we should be contented to be a follower of the Christ without a dualistic name and headship. This way, one simply becomes known as a "Christian" which ideally also means the person is an adherent of the Church of God. The reality is if one needs to state they are a member of the Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican or some other church, they are stating they have certain beliefs that have no basis in Scripture but have been introduced by the person or persons who established the particular denomination.

The majority of denominational Christian churches are usually established on dualism, that is, the teachings of Jesus are intermingled with the ideologies of man's past pagan traditions and/or their own personal perceptions. However, it was not a dual leadership church that the heavenly Father had set up to endure. Only one person was made head of the Church of God and it was God's Anointed Son, Jesus of Nazareth. We read in Ephesians 5:23b, 24a, 25b, 26: ***"...even as Christ is the head of the church... Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ... even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it: That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."*** The doctrines of most mainstream churches are mixed with both Christian and pagan teachings, and for some, mostly the latter. The followers of Christ are warned about associating with non-Christian beliefs: ***"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"*** II Corinthians 6.14. The scriptures say the "Church of God" has only one head: ***"...even as Christ is the head of the church."*** Ephesians 5:23b.

Getting back to our main topic, it is not being suggested that using the biblical name of God's church is a salvational point of doctrine or makes for a more stalwart individual. But if our faith is based on the words of Scripture then we should have an appreciation of the name "Church of God" and how it is the appellation applied to assemblies of Christians in the Bible. I Timothy 3.15: ***"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."***

To round out our discussion, it should be noted that the words "church" or "assembly", which are virtually synonymous, refer to a group of people gathered together. The word used in the Greek version of the Bible is "ecclesia" which is a

word meaning an assembly, whose members have been "called out" from a larger assembly. It is why the members of the Church of God should be proud in bearing this title. For your reference, from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: ***"# 1577 (church) ekklesia, from a comp. of 1537 and a der. of 2564; a calling out i.e. (concr) a popular meeting. Spec. a religious congregation – assembly-church."***

As we conclude our discussion, what church was it that Christ had started? The answer is found in Acts 20:28: ***"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood."*** It's important to remember that the Church of God was purchased with Jesus' own blood, making it precious. There is no other biblical name for God's church except the Church (or Assembly) of God. You can search the Scriptures but you will find no other name used for the group of members of the faith began by Jesus of Nazareth.