

DID GOD NAME HIS CHURCH?

Rom.16:16

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Some members of the church in recent times have been known to answer this question in the negative.
2. They have been known to argue in the following manner:
 - a. “Where is it stated in the Scriptures that God gave a name to his church?”
 - b. “People have made a denomination out of ‘church of Christ’ by insisting that this is a name given by God to his people.”
3. Some of those who so argue are even insisting that it is sinful to refer to the church belonging to Christ, the church we read about in the N.T., as “the church of Christ” either in a universal or a local sense. To do so, in their mind, would be to make a denomination out of the people of God, the body of te saved, who in the N.T. make up the church the Lord built and of which he is the head and the Savior.
4. Does the word of God teach that it sinful to refer to the church belonging to the Lord, the N.T. church, (either universal or local) as the church of Christ? Or does it teach that if we say God named his church then we are guilty of making a denomination out of it?
5. We answer in the negative, and affirm that God did name his church!

II. DISCUSSION

A. NOTE WHAT WE ARE NOT TEACHING WHEN WE AFFIRM THAT GOD NAMED HIS CHURCH.

1. We are not saying that God gave his church AN EXCLUSIVE PROPER NAME!
2. If this is what they mean when they say God did not give his church a name, then we would agree with them.
3. We certainly agree that God did not give the church one specific name to the exclusion of all others.
4. But we do not agree that to refer to the Lord’s church as “the church of Christ” is sinful, and that we make a denomination out of it when we do so.

B. CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING AS PROOF THAT GOD DID NAME HIS CHURCH, BUT DID NOT GIVE IT ONE SPECIFIC NAME TO THE EXCLUSION OF ALL OTHERS.

1. Note the various names, appellations and/or designations used with reference to the Lord’s church as proof of this point.

- a. Ac.20:28: "...feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (ASV: "of the Lord")
 - b. Rom.16:16: "The churches of Christ salute you."
 - c. 1Cor.1:2: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth." Cf. 1Cor.11:16; 2Cor.1:1.
 - d. Eph.4:12: "...for the edifying of the body of Christ." Cf. 1:22,23.
 - e. 1Tim.3:15: "...in the house of God, which is the church of the living God..."
2. When we have **nouns** used to refer to the N.T. church as in the passages just cited, we have **names** because **nouns are names!**
 - a. Nouns may be **common** or **proper**, but in either case (or both) **they are names.**

C. AS FURTHER PROOF OF OUR PROPOSITION, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING FROM AND BASED UPON THE SCRIPTURES AND SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES.

1. Gen.2:19,20. This passage teaches that:
 - a. Every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, were brought to Adam to be named by him.
 - b. Whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.
 - c. Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field.
 - d. Questions:
 - (1) When Adam named the fowl of the air, did he give each one **proper** name? Or did he call on fowl and "eagle," another a "raven," another a "swan," etc."
 - (2) When he named the beast of the field, did he give each beast a **proper** name, or did he call one beast a "camel," another a "lion," etc.
 - (a) Did Adam give a **proper** name such as "Leo" to each and every lion?
 - (b) The facts indicate that he gave **common**, not **proper** names.
 - (c) But he did name them. And whatever Adam **called** them, **that was their name** –common or proper!
2. Isa.61:6a says concerning some as a common name
 - a. These would "be **named** the **Priests** of the Lord."
 - b. "Men shall **call** you the **Ministers** of our God."
 - c. However, each person of the group has a **personal** name or names.
 - d. But neither would be "**the name**" to the exclusion of the other.

3. Lk.6:13 tells us Jesus NAMED the chosen twelve “**APOSTLES**”.
 - a. The twelve were named apostles – a common name.
 - b. Or course, each one had a proper name.
 - c. “Apostles” is a noun, hence a name!
 - d. Is it sinful for us to use the name “apostles” to refer to the twelve? Of course not!
4. Eph.3:14,15; Cf. Mt.3:16,17; 17:5; Heb.1:1,2.
 - a. Note what Eph.3:14,15 say about:
 - (1) The Father.
 - (2) Jesus Christ.
 - (3) The whole family in heaven and earth.
 - b. For one to ask: “What name did God give to the church?” or “What is THE NAME of the church?” is about like asking, “What name did God give his Son?” or “What is THE NAME of the Son?”
 - c. As in the case of the N.T. church, so it is in the case of God’s Son, various names were given to him.
 - (1) Isa.9:6: “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”
 - (2) Mt.1:23: “...they shall call his name Emmanuel...”
 - (3) Mt.1:25: “...and he called his name Jesus.”
 - (4) Ac.2:38: “...he baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...”
 - (5) Ac.10:38: “...Jesus of Nazareth...”
 - (6) Ac.10:48: “...be baptized in the name of the Lord.”
 - (7) 1Pet.4:14: “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ.”
 - (8) Rev.19:16: “And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”
 - f. As you can see, there was no **exclusive name** given to the Son. And it is certainly Scriptural for us to use any name, appellation and/or designation that any inspired writer used to refer to the Son.
 - g. Likewise various names, appellations and/or designations have been used by inspired writers to identify or to describe the church belonging to Christ, the N.T. church. And it is certainly proper, right, Scriptural for us to use **ANY** one or **ALL** of these to refer to the church.
 - h. If one of “the churches of Christ” of Rom.16:16 cannot Scripturally be called “a church of Christ” or “the church of Christ”, then one of “the children of God” of Gal.3:26 cannot Scripturally be called “a child of God.”

III. CONCLUSION

1. Without a doubt God named his church. I see no reason why anyone should have a problem with or object to identifying the Lord's church by **ANY** word or combination of words that inspired writers used to refer to the Lord's church.
 - a. Each and every one of them honors the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. All of these Scriptural designations or names show ownership or relationship or the nature of this body of people purchased by and belonging to the Lord and identified as his church by these names.
3. There is **NO** way God's people in this age can be properly identified without using a name or names.
4. I think some have a problem calling it "the church of Christ" because:
 - a. That designation turns of some people who are so prejudiced they are not comfortable wearing the name of Christ and these brethren want to cater to them. They are afraid they will offend such people!
 - b. In our time it is not considered "politically correct" to be so out of step with the majority of religious people.
 - c. They seem to think we should modify our stance – compromise just a little – and slip the truth over to such people on the sly.
5. Yes, it is certain that God did name his church. But it is just as certain that he did not name it either: Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Church of the Brethren, Mormon, Christian, Disciples of Christ, Adventists, or a whole host of others.
 - a. All such name are human names; unauthorized names; sinful names.
 - b. None of these names honor Christ, but men, or human movements, or religious feast days, or religious ordinances, etc.
 - c. And all who wear these names teach and practice the doctrines of men which make worship vain, Mt.15:9; Col.2:20-23. See 4 d.

[Credit to Carrol R. Sutton (The Instructor, Vol.25, No.3, 1988) for the idea and most of the thoughts presented in this lesson.]

4d. Some now go by "Community Church". Rubel Shelly, "What Is Your Church's Name?" – Lovelines, Vol.24, No.5, Feb.4, 1998: "The truth is that the name 'church of Christ' carries the baggage of an exclusivistic mentality to mny people in our culture...One lady said that she never would have come into our building if she had known we were a 'church of Christ.' Once she came in and experienced the presence of God in this body, however, she is not about to leave! She and her children --- from a very different denominational background --- are reveling in the experience of Christ in this community of faith."