

## The Church of Christ

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by Wayne Goff

Christians have become a bit hesitant these days to refer to the New Testament church as “The Church of Christ.” While I was growing up, a minor debate on the “official name” of the church was going on. It was determined, and correctly so, that there was **no one name** that could be considered “official.”

When it began on the Day of Pentecost, the body of Christ was simply called “*the church*” (Acts 2:47). This simple designation is found repeatedly in the book of Acts (5:11; 8:1, 3; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3-4, 22; 18:22; 20:17). Notably, one time it is referred to as “*the church of God*” (Acts 20:28), but even there “*God*” in that context is Jesus Christ Himself! He purchased the church with His own blood. The local church at Corinth was called “*the church of God which is at Corinth*” (1 Cor. 1:2). So again, this is another way of saying “the church of Christ.” See also 1 Corinthians 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; 1 Timothy 3:5, 15.

The first appearance of “*church*” in the New Testament is when Jesus declared in Matthew 16:18, “...*I will build My church...*” If we were to say that another way, it would be “*the church of Christ*” or “*the church of Jesus Christ*.” This would be most correct because the church found in the New Testament belongs to Jesus. He built it, He is its Founder, and it is Divine!

Thirty-five times in the New Testament the **plural** is used, such as at Romans 16:16, “*Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.*” Often the phrase “*churches of God*” is used (1 Cor. 11:16; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4). So why do we not find faithful churches today using the phrase “Church of God”? It would be appropriate and certainly biblical, but not everyone would understand that “*God*” means “*Christ*” in this designation. So it would not be the most expedient phrase to use. But a church might still use it.

When we read about the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 2-3), it is abundantly evident that Jesus Christ is the Head of them! Jesus delivers positive encouragement and also rebuke when needed. In each of the seven letters, the churches are encouraged to “*hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” But we know that the Spirit is delivering the message authorized by Jesus Christ (see Jn. 16:13-14). Jesus Christ is the One who “*searches the minds and hearts*” and gives to each one “*according to your works*” (Rev. 23:23). Jesus Christ is the One who threatens to remove their “*candlestick*” or “*lampstand*” of Divine Identity if they do not repent! (Rev. 1:20; 2:1, 5).

So whether we refer to the redeemed saints as “*the church*,” “*the church of Christ*” or “*the church of God (Christ)*,” **the prevailing thought** is that Jesus Christ is the Head of His church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22), “*He is the Savior of the body*” (Eph. 5:23), and in all things He must have “*the preeminence*” (Col. 1:18).

With such overwhelming evidence, why are brethren today almost afraid to call the Lord’s body, “*the church of Christ*”? I fear that in trying to be **so scriptural**, we have “watered down” the point that there is one, true church, and that the many denominations today which call themselves “church of \_\_\_\_” are not really “churches” that belong to Christ at all! In the words of some pioneer preachers of the past, “in trying to go back to Jerusalem, some have passed it by and landed in Jericho!” I believe it is time to go to the Scriptures, the Creed Book of Jesus Christ, and call the church what it truly **is** — ***the church that belongs to Christ!*** If we fear driving away visitors, perhaps it is because we are trying to “sneak” them in without proper conviction.

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