

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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Is it important what name we, as believers in Jesus Christ, use to identify ourselves? Judging by the myriad of different names that we find in use by members of religious organizations all claiming to follow Christ, we can certainly conclude that there is not really much in a name as far as most *people* are concerned. However, the key question is, What does *God* say about it?

The importance of the name

Whatever we believe in the realm of life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3) must come from the teachings of God's word (Rom 10:17). Isaiah 62:2 contains a New Testament prophecy that God's people would one day "be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name." After the Lord's church was established, we read in Acts 11:26 that "the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." The language of this verse denotes the name "Christian" as a *God-given name*, as prophesied in old time. Thus, God *authorizes* that name to be used to describe Christ's disciples. Jesus Christ possesses *all authority in heaven and in earth* (Matt 28:18). Therefore, everything we do in word or deed must be done by his authority (Col 3:17). That necessarily includes the name we use to designate ourselves. Collectively, Christians belong to the body of Christ, which is his church (1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 1:22-23). The New Testament uses the term "church of God" frequently (e.g. 1 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:13). It certainly makes sense for the church to be called by its founder and owner. Similarly, Romans 16:16 uses the name of the Son, who built the church (Matt 16:18) and purchased it with his own blood (Acts 20:28): "*The churches of Christ salute you.*" We do not find authority in the Bible for calling Christians after the name of any man, or by some special method, doctrine, or practice. We should use the terms found in scripture (1 Pet 4:11).

The name alone is not enough

Having the right name is obviously not the *only* thing that matters,

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and is not all there is to practicing pure and undefiled religion before God. In Revelation 3:1, Jesus Christ wrote a letter to the church at Sardis and rebuked them for having a name that they were alive, while they were in fact dead (Rev 3:1). Even the things which remained were ready to die (Rev 3:2). This teaches us an extremely important lesson. This was the Sardis “church of Christ,” but that name alone was not enough to save them. In truth, there is no real practical difference between an *unfaithful* “church of Christ” and any denominational church.

Denominations have not been planted by God, and will be rooted up by Him (Matt 15:13). Neither denominations nor unfaithful churches of Christ are alive to God and both will be eternally punished if they do not repent. The only major difference is that the punishment will be worse for those who truly were Christians but then turned away from the truth (Luke 12:47-48; 2 Pet 2:20-22).

Our standard of fellowship

Some brethren will fellowship any preacher, any brother, or any congregation that claims to be of “the church of Christ.” We must not be like that. Christ said, *“Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven”* (Matt 7:21). The letter to the church at Sardis emphatically demonstrates that our standard of fellowship must not only include the right name, but also everything that is taught and practiced. *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another”* (1 John 1:7). Sardis was not walking in the light. Therefore, the Lord told them to repent. Otherwise, Jesus said he would come on them as a thief and they would not know the hour. Wearing an unscriptural name will surely cause us to be condemned, but we must have more than the right name for the church. Only those who *do the will of God* will enter into the kingdom of heaven.