

## The New Testament Church

### Part I I: The Name of the Church

#### Exodus 3:13-15

#### I. INTRODUCTION: I

- I. **2** In Exodus 3:13-15 the scriptures record a conversation between Jehovah and Moses.
  - A. Moses is tending his father-in-law Jethro's sheep in the land of Midian.
    - (1) Moses comes to Mount Horeb where the Lord appears to him in the burning bush.
    - (2) Moses' curiosity is piqued by the sight and he turns aside to investigate.
  - B. When he turns aside the Lord calls out to him: "*Moses, Moses!*" (v. 4)
    - (1) The Lord informs him He has "*surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt*" (v. 7).
    - (2) Therefore, the Lord says, "*I have come down to deliver them... Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.*" (vv. 8-10).
  - C. If you recall, Moses was very reluctant: "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?*" (v. 11)
  - D. How were God's people to know who Moses was and who had sent him? God responds to Moses and gives us three important principles about names:
    - (1) Names have meaning and significance: the name Jehovah means "*I AM.*"
      - (a) Jehovah's name declares He is perfect and has an unconditioned and independent existence.
      - (b) Jehovah's name says He is the eternal, uncaused and infinite One (cf. Rom. 1:20).
    - (2) Names denote relationships: the name "*Jehovah*" meant nothing to the heathen nations (e.g., **Ex. 5:2**: "*And Pharaoh said, 'Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.'*").
      - (a) But to Israel the name "*Jehovah*" identifies their God, the God of their fathers, the God that sent Moses, the God that rescued them from Egyptian bondage with great works, etc.
    - (3) Names are a memorial to identity and character:
      - (a) Jehovah is God's name forever!
      - (b) God's name, Jehovah, forever serves as a memorial (reminder) identifying Him with His people Israel (remember: Christians are "*the Israel of God*"; Gal. 6:16).
- E. **3** No good Bible student can read the scriptures and not come to the conclusion that names are important and significant.
  - (1) Abram's name ("*high father*") was changed to Abraham ("*father of a multitude*") when God reaffirmed His covenant/promises with him (i.e., nation, land, seed; Gen. 17:4-5).
  - (2) Jacob's name ("*supplanter*") was changed to Israel ("*to strive with God*") after he wrestled with Jehovah and prevailed (Gen. 32:28).
  - (3) Geographical places were given significant names that memorialized events or characteristics, for example:
    - (a) Bethel was a small town about 10 miles north of Jerusalem; its name means "*house of God.*"
      - (i) Here Jacob had his dream and the Lord restated the Abrahamic promises to him.

- (ii) Therefore, Jacob worshiped the Lord and took his stone pillow and set it up as a memorial to the Lord, he then “called the name of that place Bethel” (Gen. 28:19)
- (b) In 1 Samuel 7, Samuel the judge prays on behalf of the Israelites giving them a victory over the Philistines: **1 Sam. 7:12:** “Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the LORD has helped us.’” Ebenezer means “stone of help.”
- (4) We could multiply examples from the Old Testament by the hundreds.
- (5) The New Testament follows this same pattern in regards to names.
  - (a) Jesus came into the world with various names having important meanings and significance:
    - (i) The Holy Spirit told Joseph to name Him “Jesus.” Because the name Jesus means “Jehovah is salvation”; Joseph was told “you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:21). “Christians honor that name, confess it, are baptized into it, and call him ‘savior,’ knowing that there is no ‘other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12).” (Stauffer, p. 59)
    - (ii) Jesus was also called “Immanuel”; “which is translated, ‘God with us.’” (Matt. 1:23). This name is an insight into Jesus’ identity as deity.
  - (b) Other significant uses of names in the New Testament show names were just as important as they were in the Old Testament:
    - (i) Jesus was crucified on “Golgotha” which fittingly means “the place of a skull” (Matt. 27:33).
    - (ii) In John 1:42 Jesus said “Simon the son of Jonah” would eventually “be called Cephas” (which is translated, A Stone).” Why?
 

“The stone, or rock, is a symbol of firmness and steadiness of character—a trait in Peter’s character AFTER the ascension of Jesus that was very remarkable. BEFORE the death of Jesus he was rash, headlong, variable; and it is one proof of the omniscience of Jesus that he saw that Peter ‘would’ possess a character that would be expressed appropriately by the word ‘stone’ or ‘rock.’” (Barnes’ Notes)

2. **4** The purpose of lesson 11 in this series on The New Testament Church will be to examine the name of the church and the significance of its name.

## II. DISCUSSION:

### I. **5** Denominational Names:

- A. Amazingly, despite the biblical precedents for the importance and significance of “names”; denominationalists affirm “There’s nothing in a name”!
  - (1) I’ve even heard them quote the old saying, “There nothing in a name?! After all, a rose would smell as sweet by any other name.”
  - (2) They say this to support the use of their divisive and sectarian names: “Baptist,” “Pentecostal,” “Methodist,” “Presbyterian,” “Episcopal,” “Lutheran,” “Wesleyan,” and so forth.
  - (3) They will admit these names are not found in the Bible, but they use them to differentiate themselves from other denominations.
- B. **6** In reality they contradict what they affirm: “there’s nothing in a name”! Think about it:
  - (1) Why does a “Presbyterian” call himself by that name and not by the name “Baptist”?

- (a) Because names mean nothing! No! There really is something in a name!
- (b) The name “Presbyterian” differentiates that sect and its unique doctrines and practices from those of the “Baptists.”
- (c) The name “Baptist” implies “immersion” for baptism, whereas the name “Presbyterian” rejects immersion because he believes in “sprinkling” for baptism.
- (2) In turn, the “Baptist” rejects the name “Episcopalian” because the “Baptist” believes in a congregational form of church government, while the “Episcopalian” follows “diocesan” organization where “bishops” rule over many congregations.
- C. What’s my point? **Names are important!** Regardless of their protestations to the contrary, denominationalists believe there is a lot in a name!
- D. Thus, the important question becomes: “Is God offended by names He never mentions in Scripture?” And, “Is God offended by names that identify and honor sectarian doctrines, concepts and practices?”
- E. **7** To answer we must ask: “Why do these different names arise?” The key word is “sectarianism.”
  - (1) A “sectarian” is a member of a “sect,” which is a group that separates itself based on its own peculiar beliefs and practices.
  - (2) The dictionary also properly defines “sect” as “a group regarded as heretical or as deviating from a generally accepted religious tradition.” (*Dictionary.com*)
    - (i) The word “heresy” is used in the New Testament to describe an ungodly party spirit that fractures the unity of God’s people.
    - (ii) Heresy is condemned in **Galatians 5:19-21** as a work “of the flesh” which like “adultery...idolatry...hatred...murder...drunkenness,” etc. will result in one not inheriting “the kingdom of God...”; in other words, sectarians are lost and going to hell!
- F. **8** Where does sectarianism arise from? It arises from a false understanding of the NT Church.
  - (1) “Denominationalists, especially since the Reformation, view the ‘one body’ as a universal church consisting of a multiplicity of different churches.” (Stauffer, p. 59)
  - (2) Sectarians (i.e., denominationalists) often use Jesus’ analogy of the “vine and branches” (Jn. 15:1-6) as a justification for their divisive practices and party spirit.
    - (a) According to them, Christ is the “vine” and individual denominations are the “branches.”
    - (b) However, in this passage Jesus is speaking to His disciples about their relationship with Him and their need to bear spiritual fruit in their lives; the church is not yet even in existence or even anticipated at this time. Thus, the notion that denominational churches represents the “branches” totally ignores the context.
    - (c) Furthermore, the notion that denominational churches are the branches totally ignores the plain wording of the text: the text plainly identifies the “branches” as individual Christians (**Jn. 15:6**: “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.”).
- G. The church consists not of a sisterhood of churches, but is composed of Christ as its head (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18) and individual Christians make up the “members of His body” (Eph. 5:30; Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-17; Eph. 4:11-16; **1 Pet. 2:17**: “Love the brotherhood.” (i.e., state, condition, nature).

- (1) The church, in its universal sense is composed of faithful Christians; it consists of men and women whose names “are registered in heaven” (Heb. 12:22-23), not of sectarian bodies invented by men!
- (2) “Local churches sometimes include erring disciples whom God has blotted from the book of life. Or, churches occasionally go so far into apostasy that God removes their lampstand (see Rev. 2:5).” (Stauffer, p. 59)
- (3) The Scriptures provide absolutely no justification for denominationalism and their sectarian, divisive names!

## 2. **9** Origin of Denominationalism:

A. Denominationalism can be traced to at least two primary causes:

### (1) Carnality:

- (a) Ambitious, arrogant, and/or misguided men gender division (carnality) when they promote themselves or their own ideas above the Lord (His word).

**Acts 20:28-31:** “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”

- (b) Or, followers exalt these leaders beyond what is written (**1 Cor. 4:6:** “that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written”).

- (2) Faith Only: “Faith only” was the fatal flaw of the Reformation (e.g., Luther, Calvin) and to this day dominates the theology of nearly every denomination (Jas. 2:24).

### B. **10** Carnality:

- (1) Carnality in the church began very early; threatened to tear up “the church which is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:1).
- (2) Among some of the saints at Corinth the “wisdom of the world” was of more importance than the “word of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:17-25; 3:1-4).
- (3) This philosophy or attitude manifested itself when some of the brethren there said, “I am of Paul,” while others said, “I of Apollos,” and even others said, “I of Cephas” (1 Cor. 1:10).
- (4) This is evidence of a party spirit; Paul identifies that spirit as “contentions” (1 Cor. 1:11), in other words, it is indicative of a divisive spirit where groups of brethren sought to separate themselves into distinctly differing groups.
- (5) Note that Paul severely condemns this spirit:

**1 Cor. 3:1-4:** “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?”

- (6) Paul responds to their sectarianism in two ways:

- (a) First, he emphasizes that they must be perfectly united as brethren in Christ:

**1 Cor. 1:10:** “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

- (b) Second, he asks them a series of rhetorical questions in v. 13 to remind them of their unity in Christ:

- ☛ “Is Christ divided?” (v. 13),
- ☛ “Was Paul crucified for you?” (v. 13),
- ☛ “Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?” (v. 13).

- (7) Sectarians of every age must ponder the similar questions.

- ☛ Must not all in Christ be one?
- ☛ Must not we still “speak the same thing”?
- ☛ Must there not “be no divisions among” us?
- ☛ Must we not still “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”?

- (8) In Paul’s day the church was united because they understood there was but “one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all” (Eph. 4:4-6).

- (9) \*\* That remains true today! Similar questions are as legitimate now as they were then:

- ☛ “Was Luther or Calvin crucified for you?”
- ☛ “Were you baptized into the name of Wesley or Campbell?”
- ☛ “Is there nothing in a name?”

- (10) **The very fact denominations use different names says there is a great deal in a name!**

C. **II Faith Only:**

- (1) Doctrinally diverse and warring factions abound in the denominational world today; each manifesting the same carnal, divisive spirit condemned by God through the inspired apostle Paul in the first century.
- (2) One common element of most denominations is the idea that man is saved by “faith only.”
- (a) Developed over time from the theology of such men as Augustine, Luther and Calvin.
- (b) Once men believe salvation comes by “faith only” nothing else really matters. For example:
- ☛ It makes no difference what name your denomination wears and exalts.
  - ☛ It makes no difference how new members are admitted to the group.
  - ☛ It makes no difference how one worships as long as it is offered in sincerity.
  - ☛ It makes no difference what activities the denomination supports and promotes as long as it is done in “Jesus name.”
  - ☛ It makes no difference how the denomination is organized as long as we “get the job done.”
  - ☛ Doctrinal differences between denominations really don’t matter, because after all “even though we are following different roads, we’re headed for the same destination!”

- (3) “Sectarian denominationalism is but a symptom of the theological error that faith alone is sufficient.” (Stauffer, p. 60)
- (4) **12** It is only when men understand that, like Abraham, men are justified by “*obedience to the faith*” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) and not by “faith only” that will they be in a position to understand what God authorized His church to be.
- (a) “*faith only*” does not justify a man! Faith only is condemned by God!
- Jas. 2:24:** “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”
- Jas. 2:26:** “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”
- (b) Make no mistake, the works that save are not man’s works, it is when we do the “good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:10; it is “*faith working through love*” (Gal. 5:6).
- (c) It is the “working faith” exhibited by those in the “hall of fame of the faithful” (Heb. 11).
- (5) **13** It is only when we properly couple “faith and works” that Jesus actually becomes our “Lord” (Lk. 6:46; Heb. 5:9); for it is only then that we will do the will of the Father (**Matt. 7:21-23**).
- (6) There is more to “*faith*” than simply “*belief*” (Heb. 11; **Jas. 2:19:** “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble!”):
- (a) Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (Jn. 14:15).
- (b) The proof we really know and love God is found in a faith that “keep[s] His commandments” (1 Jn. 2:3-5).
- (7) Only when men come to a true understanding of the “obedient faith” of the Bible will they assent to follow the New Testament pattern for the church and reject the work of the flesh known as denominationalism!

### 3. **14** Name of God and Christ:

#### A. Does the New Testament church have a name?

- (1) Some argue that the church has a specific name and that to deviate from that name is heresy.
- (2) Some, as we’ve already seen believe there’s nothing in a name.
- (3) I believe each of these views is extreme and unscriptural.

#### B. How do we answer the question: Does the New Testament church have a name?

- (1) First, we need to start with the fact of ownership: the church belongs to God and Christ.
- ☛ The church is an eternal creation of God (Eph. 3:10-11),
  - ☛ The church is “*the household of God*” (Eph. 2:19; cf. 1 Tim. 3:15),
  - ☛ The church is the dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17),
  - ☛ The church is His kingdom, His domain of rule over the hearts and minds of men (Acts 8:12; Col. 1:13),
- (2) Second, we need to examine Christ’s relationship with the church:
- ☛ The church was built by Christ (Matt. 16:18),
  - ☛ Christ is the “*head of the church*” (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; Matt. 28:18),

- ☛ Christ is the redeemer, savior, husband, king and lawgiver to the church (Eph. 5:23-25; Col. 1:13; Jas. 4:11-12),
- ☛ The church is Christ's "*purchased possession*" (Eph. 1:14) since Christ "*purchased with His own blood*" (Acts 20:28).

(3) Since all of these points are true and found in Scripture wouldn't one expect the name of the church to be related to God and Christ? This is precisely what the Scriptures teach!

C. **15** The Scriptures give several names for the church, all of which are related to God and Christ:

- (1) "*church of God*" (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 3:5),
- (2) "*churches of God*" (1 Cor. 11:16; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4),
- (3) "*church of the Thessalonians in God and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 2:1),
- (4) "*churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus*" (1 Thess. 2:14),
- (5) "*churches of Christ*" (Rom. 16:16),
- (6) "*the church*" (Rev. 2:1, 8; 3:14),

D. **16** This makes three things abundantly clear:

- (1) The New Testament church does not have one, specific, scriptural and exclusive name; therefore, it is wrong to go around and say, "This is the name of the church and if you don't use that name you're sinning."
- (2) In the New Testament we find a variety of "names" for the church and each of those names expresses the relationship or characteristic of the church in regards to God and/or Christ.
- (3) The notion that names are unimportant and have no meaning is **not** a doctrine taught in the New Testament.

E. **\*\*** Thus, any name we wish to apply to ourselves is acceptable if it meets these scriptural criteria.

F. I want to emphasize: The assertion of denominationalists that names are unimportant and have no meaning is false.

- (1) The scriptures obviously do not teach this principle!
- (2) Denominationalism verbally affirms the position that names don't matter, but just as quickly they deny it by the very names they uniquely apply to themselves!

G. If we are going to "get back to the Bible" (i.e., 1 Pet. 4:11) and imitate the God-approved church of the first century we will be content with one of these scriptural designations for the church. Names that:

- (1) Bring honor and glory to the name of God and of Christ.
- (2) Show the relationship of God and Christ to the church (e.g., owner, builder, purchaser).

### III. CONCLUSION: **17**

I. In reality, denominations take names seriously **except** when they involve giving honor, glory and praise to God, Christ and His word.

- A. None of them would accept the name "Church of Satan" or "Church of the Damned" because of what those names say and mean.
- B. Yet they deny their man-made names that glorify and honor men or some doctrinal peculiarity mean and say anything.



2. In reality their names are an affront to God and Christ because they are indicative of the divisive and sectarian attitudes which define denominationalism.
3. **19** Before closing I want to make three things very clear:
  - A. We are not out to “bash and browbeat” denominationalism; we are simply pointing out the scriptures teach they are in error (Ezek. 33; **Gal. 4:16**: “*Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*”). Anyone should welcome such correction (**Psa. 141:5**: “*Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it.*”).
  - B. Wearing a scriptural name (e.g., Christian, church of Christ, church of God) will not make an individual or a church these things; recall what Jesus said to the church in Sardis: “*you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead*” (Rev. 3:1).
  - C. We do not claim to have an exclusive franchise on the truth or the name “church of Christ.”
    - (1) Anyone can be a part of Christ’s church if he obeys the gospel (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; Eph. 4:4) and faithfully abides in “*the doctrine of Christ*” (2 Jn. 9).
    - (2) Any such group of Christians can band together to work and worship and legitimately call themselves by such scriptural designations as “church of Christ” “church of God” without permission from some earthly headquarters. They simply must recognize the authority of Christ (Matt. 28:18) and submit to it (Col. 3:17).
4. **\*\*** Jesus said: “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*” (Matt. 11:28-30)
  - (1) We want to extend Jesus’ invitation to you now to become simply a “Christian,” nothing more and nothing less.
  - (2) We are not asking you to become a member of a denomination, because we are not a denomination.
  - (3) We simply follow Christ and His word (Jn. 12:48); that makes us part of the church He built and purchased with His own blood (Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28).
  - (4) Won’t you come and join yourself to Christ today?! You can do so by exercising an obedient faith, confessing Christ, repenting of your sins and being buried with Him in baptism. Christ will then wash away your sins, add you to His church, and give you the hope of eternal life.

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