

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

THE NAMES OF THE CHURCH

By Bill Cavender

Our Savior said, ***“Upon this rock I will build my church”*** (Matt. 16:18). He, Himself, the Son of the Living God, is that Rock, the Foundation, the chief Corner Stone (Isa. 28:14-20; 1 Cor. 10:4; 3:1-1; .Eph. 2:20; Acts 4;1 I-12; 1 Pet. 2:6). All our hopes for salvation from sins now and: salvation in the eternal realms of heaven are centered in Him, ***“the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”*** This truth every believer subscribes to without reservation all his life, believing and confessing before baptism and forever after that ***“Jesus Christ is the Son of God”*** (Acts 8:36-38; Rom. 10:9-10).

God’s redemptive plan of salvation, made effective by His wisdom, love, grace and kindness toward us, is accomplished through the coming of Jesus; His life, words, and death on the cross for our sins; and is made known to us through the gospel. Jesus instructed His apostles, ***“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned”*** (Mk. 16:15-16). The Spirit-filled apostle Paul said, ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek”*** (Rom. 1:16): When lost sinners hear, believe and obey the gospel, they are then saved from their past sins (1 Cor. 15:1-4; 1 Pet. 1:22-25; Mk. 16:16).

On the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, the gospel was first preached as a fact in the name of the crucified and risen Lord and Savior. As a result of hearing the gospel, lost men first cried out, asking what to do to be saved. Peter, a Spirit-guided apostle, using the ***“keys of the kingdom”*** (Matt. 16:19) given him by Jesus, told those inquiring sinners, ***“Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”*** (Acts 2:37-38). After other words of teaching, exhortation and warning, ***“They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls”*** (Acts 2:39-41). From that day until this the Lord has continued to add to the church daily those who are saved by obeying the gospel of Christ (Acts 2:47; 5:14; 11:24).

This church which began on Pentecost day in Jerusalem in A.D. 33 is that of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 16:18. The word ***“church”*** is used to translate the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means “to call out of” or “to call out from.” *Ekklesia* occurs one hundred fifteen times in our New Testament in its singular and plural forms. Three times it is translated ***“assembly”*** in reference to the mob which gathered in Ephesus (Acts 19:32, 39, 41), and one time it is translated ***“church”*** in reference to the nation of Israel at Sinai led by Moses (Acts 7:38). All other one hundred, and eleven references are to ***“the church”*** which, Jesus said, He would build and to which the saved are added (Matt. 16:18, Acts 2:41, 47), either speaking of ***“the church”*** in a locality (local congregation) or in its universal or general, world-wide existence without reference to specific locality.

Each member of the church, the body of people belonging to Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27; Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 5:23; 1:22-23) has been “called out of” or “called from” the world of evil, sinful people (Gal. 1:4). Each child of God in the church was formerly a servant of sin but through obedience to the gospel has become a servant of righteousness, free from the guilt of sin; forgiven by God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:1-7, 16-18; 7:24-25; 8:1-4; Heb. 8:12). Each such saved person has been called out of the sinful world through and by the gospel of Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14). By this means, God calls us into the fellowship of His Son. We respond to His calling by obeying His will, in effect calling upon Him to fulfill the promises tendered us through Christ and made known in the gospel (1 Cor. 1:9; Acts 22:16). God is said to deliver ***“us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love”*** (Col. 1:13).

The word ***“church”*** is one of the two common names used in the New Testament to designate such called, obedient, saved people. ***“The church”*** is always people – saved people – people who have heard, believed and obeyed the gospel of Christ (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; 1:1-2). The word is used of the church in a certain location (Acts 8:1; Rev. 2:1, 8, etc.); of the church in its world-wide, general sense without regard to location (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 1:22-23,

etc.); of the churches in a province or area (2 Cor. 8:1; Acts 9:31, etc.); of the churches as to ethnic background or citizenship (Rom. 16:4; 1 Thess. 1:1, etc.); of the churches as being the possession of God and Christ (Rom. 16:16; 1 Thess. 2:14; Tit. 2:14, etc.)

There are other names, terms and designations in the New Testament for these same saved people who are called ***“the church.”*** In defining the word “name” in his dictionary (Collegiate, Fifth Edition, 1947), ***Webster*** says, among other definitions: “1. The title by which any person or thing is known or designated.” As synonyms he lists, among others, the words “designation, appellation, title.” Under the verb he says, “1. To give a distinctive name to; entitle; style; term . . . 2. To refer to by name; mention . . . 4. To call by name; to identify or specify by class or proper names.” Under the noun “designation,” he says, “1. Act of designation; indication. 2. Appointment for a specific purpose. 3. A distinguishing mark, or title; appellation.” Under the verb “designate,” he says, “1. To mark out and make known; to indicate; show; specify. 2. To name; characterize. 3. To indicate or set apart for a purpose.” We now look briefly at some of these other names, designations or appellations which are given to ***“the church;”*** God’s saved people, in the New Testament.

The other common name or designation of God’s people in the New Testament is ***“kingdom.”*** The word is found one hundred fifty-one times, one hundred twenty-one of these having reference to God’s people as His kingdom while they live in this world and in their eternal existence in heaven. Jesus is the King of this heavenly kingdom of born-again people (Jn. 18:37; 3:3-5; 1 Tim. 6:15; Heb. 7:1-2). We are citizens of this spiritual, heavenly kingdom if we have been born again, ***“being translated into the kingdom of the Son of his love”*** (Phil. 3:20-21; Eph. 2:19; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9). The word ***“kingdom”*** is the appellation which denotes the relationship of the citizens of the kingdom to their King. We are His subjects; He is our King. The church is not a republic nor dictatorship, nor democracy in government. It is a kingdom ruled over by the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ the Son of the Living God.

Fifteen times in the New Testament the church is referred to as ***“the body”*** of Christ, all of these being used by Paul through the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13; Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13; 12:27; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 11-12, 16; 5:23, 30; Col. 1:18; 2:17; 3:15). These scriptures teach that the church, ***“the body of Christ,”*** is (1) a ***“called out”*** body; (2) a ***“ruled over”*** body; (3) a ***“reconciled”*** body; (4) a ***“joined together”*** body; (5) a ***“saved”*** body. The name ***“body”*** in reference to God’s people, the church, designates the relationship of each member of the body, one to the other, and of that body having Jesus as ***“the Head,”*** directing all actions of the body.

The church is also named the ***“house”*** or ***“household”*** of God, His family. ***“The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth,”*** is also that ***“household of God”*** wherein all Gentile Christians as well as Jewish Christians are children of the ***“one God and Father of all”*** (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:19; 4:6). Jesus is the Son over His house (Heb. 3:6). The ***“household of God”*** is His family (Eph. 3:15; Col. 4:15; Heb. 10:21; 1 Pet. 4:17; Gal. 6:10). We are His children, He is our Father, and Jesus Christ is His Son whose house (family) we are and who rules over us.

As a body of worshipers and priests unto God, the church is designated as a ***“temple”*** or a ***“spiritual house”*** in which we are ***“living stones”*** (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Jesus is our ***“High Priest”*** (Heb. 4:14; 5:5-10; 6:20; 7:1-28) and we are a ***“royal priesthood,”*** each of us having the right to offer up ***“spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”*** (1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6).

Other names of God’s people, the church, are appellations such as: (1) ***“the bride of Christ”*** (Rev. 21:2; Rom. 7:4; Eph. 5:22-33; 2 Cor. 11:2), Christ being the Bridegroom and the church His bride. (2) ***“The flock of God”*** (1 Pet. 5:2-4; 2:25; Heb. 13:20; Lk. 12:32; Acts 20:28-29; John 10:1-16), we being the sheep of His pasture and Christ being the Good Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

All the names, designations and appellations given to the church, the children of God in a collective sense, should be used among all who know and believe the truth. We should continually use all the terms and names in our preaching, teaching and writing, that God’s people be instructed in the undenominational nature of the Lord’s church.

Oftentimes it is contended by some that the name ***“the church of Christ”*** has been denominationalized. This cannot be true from the standpoint of the name itself as ***“church of Christ”*** (singular, the plural being ***“churches of Christ,”*** Rom. 16:16) is a scriptural name given by the Holy Spirit through Paul. Using that appellation does not make a church a denominational, sectarian church. To that extent a church would be on scriptural ground as to name. A church might be denominational as to organization (having conferences, associations, conventions, boards, sponsoring churches and elderships); it might be denominational as to worship (choirs, mechanical instruments of music,

beads, rosaries, incense); it might be sectarian in teaching (sprinkling for baptism, infant church membership, faith only salvation); a church might be denominational in work (church recreation, social activities, politics, subsidizing human institutions). But simply using the name “*church of Christ*” does not make a church denominational.

Since we exist in a world of people regulated by civil laws (federal, state, local), and since each congregation of Christ exists as a separate entity (“*a thing which has reality and distinctness of being either in fact or for thought,*” *Webster*), a uniformity of identity to conform to laws of men, to maintain a separate identity from sectarian denominationalism, and to identify true churches of the Lord insofar as a scriptural name is concerned, our brethren through the years have found it expedient to designate themselves as “*churches of Christ.*”

Local churches own, buy and sell property; they hold bank accounts, depositing and disbursing monies by identifying checks. They buy merchandise and services, with tax exemptions and charge accounts. They hold U.S. Postal Service numbers of identification for the mailing of literature. These areas, and in others in which local churches exist and operate, demand a uniformity of an identifying name from the legal and world’s standpoint. The name “*church of Christ*” is scriptural and is expedient for such a purpose.

Denominational churches have, in many instances, taken scriptural names or appellations to identify themselves, yet in their organizations, doctrines, worship and works they demonstrate their sectarian character. A church, to be a true “*church of Christ*” must conform to the scriptures in more than just the name it uses to identify itself.

Brethren themselves in a world of false churches of every possible conception and description, need a common point of recognition and identification. It is a small world in which we now live. Brethren may find themselves on almost any point of the globe at any time. If they are to seek out, find, worship and work with brethren of “*like precious faith*” (2 Pet. 1:1), an expedient and scriptural name common to us all aids immensely in our seeking to be found and among faithful brethren.

Let us teach the scriptures diligently, using among ourselves all the terms, names, designations and appellations found in God’s word which describe us and show our relationships to each other and to the Deity. Let us not become denominational in our name, organization, functions and attitudes. But just because we generally use the name “*church of Christ*” for public identity purposes does not make us denominational in that one function. ■

Small Blessings Are Still Blessings

By Steven Harper

Have you ever been hoping for, or maybe even expecting, some sort of increase in income, only to find out it was not as much as you had hoped for or expected? I remember when I was a lot younger and working in the fast-food business and had been working for several months at this one restaurant, doing my best and trying to impress the owners, and was told that I should expect a raise after 90 days. When the day came, I was told by management that I would be getting an increase, but one far smaller than anticipated. I was disappointed at first, and even a little upset, but then I stopped and thought, “It’s still more than what I had before.” For a moment, I was not grateful for the increase—until I remembered it was an increase.

The truth is, we sometimes are ungrateful — or maybe just not as thankful as we should be — because what we have been given is not as much as we would like, not as much as someone else received, or maybe just something that was not at all what we expected or maybe *wanted*. In those times, we forget the reality of being blessed with something more than what we had before, or just a gift that has been given by someone who was not obligated at all to us, but who wanted to give *something* to show their appreciation or maybe even “just because.” In our moment of disappointment at not receiving what we wanted or expected, we forgot that small blessings are still blessings!

In a society where we are materially blessed greater than many other people around the world, it is easy to sometimes forget this. We see and hear advertisements multiple times each day that promote some new and improved object, and are designed to get us to want, and then purchase, this object. Much of the advertising today is also designed to help make us feel unhappy with what object or objects we already have, and get us to think this new and improved object will make us happier and our lives better than they were before. As long as the advertising works as they intend, we will not be satisfied unless and until we obtain that new object, and anything less or different will be a disappointment. Should we somehow be able to obtain some other new, or maybe just new to us, object, all we see is

that it is not that one object we wanted — and we are disappointed. And ungrateful. This sometimes seems to be a never-ending cycle for many, and a lot of unhappy people the result.

And let us not think this cannot happen with non-material things, either. Sometimes, we just don't hear certain words of praise or thankfulness from others that we would like to hear, so we are disappointed and, ironically, ungrateful for the words we *do* hear. Sometimes, when we are so focused on the words we want to hear, we don't really listen to what is said, and we miss out on smaller blessings and *different* words of praise or thankfulness. Sometimes, we fail to acknowledge that blessings that may be smaller than what we expected, or maybe just *different* than what we expected, are still blessings.

I write all this to lead us to stop and think about all the many blessings we receive and enjoy as disciples of Jesus Christ and how we sometimes overlook, or fail to appreciate as much as we could and should, the blessings we do have and enjoy. Sometimes, it happens as with the material objects we want or expect and we end up not being thankful for the small blessings because we were too focused on the big ones. Sometimes, we are so focused on the big blessings of eternal life and heaven that we haven't yet received, and won't until we pass from this life, that we forget the smaller blessings we now enjoy! Maybe we have even overlooked these blessings altogether? Again, let us consider:

The Bible. I would not classify this as a 'small' blessing at all, but it just may be that we have overlooked this altogether sometimes as a blessing. But stop and think about how this world — your world — would be drastically different [for the worse] without it! Where would you be? Where would this world be? The reality is, this world would be much worse without the Bible, for it has revealed to us the simplicity of God's plan for our salvation, but also the great wisdom of that plan, our great need for that plan, and the great love God had for His Creation in providing such a plan. It is forever true that *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Without God having given us all that is contained within Scripture, we would not know what great love has been shown to us or what great blessings await the faithful, so take the time to be thankful for this blessing, and consider that there would be a lot more evil in this world and a lot less good being done if man did not have the written word. It is not a small blessing, but it is certainly one of the most overlooked and under-appreciated ones.

Our Spiritual Family. Recent polls have revealed that regular attendance or even involvement in any church has dropped to an all-time low in this country; while we lament this sad trend, let us not overlook the fact that this will mean future generations not ever knowing about the blessing of having a loving, caring 'family' of believers, and many more who won't be touched by the lives of those who are strengthened and assisted by the spiritual family of which they are a part. Fewer faithful and active disciples mean a more narrow influence on the communities around the ones who still serve the Lord, and a lesser impact on society, as a whole. While it may seem insignificant or even meaningless to some, this world will be much worse off without, or with fewer, followers of Christ. From the very beginning, His people made an impact on the world around them (cf. Acts 2:41-37), and because of their active faith, they had *"favor with all the people."* Let us not overlook the fact that the believers themselves were blessed by one another! Let us not overlook or under-appreciate the blessing we are and can be to one another; sometimes we are all we've got, and that is what gets us through the most difficult of times.

Good Teachers. Many of us still remember the good teachers we had back in high school, junior high, or even elementary school. We remember them because they helped us and inspired us to learn! Do we not also remember the good teachers we have had [or now have] in spiritual things? Whether it is a Bible class teacher, a preacher, or just someone who has taken the time to sit down with us and help us in a personal, one-on-one Bible study, I think we all know someone who has helped us tremendously in our efforts to learn God's word and God's ways. Do we recognize them as one of our small blessings? Think about how grateful the Ethiopian eunuch had to have been because Philip came to him and taught him Jesus (Acts 8:26-38)! Part of his rejoicing was due to the fact he had someone teach him the very words that led to his conversion and salvation!

There are certainly many more 'small' [and not-so-small] blessings we can and do enjoy, but let us never overlook the fact they *are* blessings. Take the time to thank God for each and every one. — *The Words of Truth and Reason*, July 18, 2021. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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