



# The Reflector

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## Would you believe and practice New Testament Christianity if we changed our name? Or, does the term “church of Christ” offend you?

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Part of a growing movement adopted both by denominations as well as some formerly called “churches of Christ” has been to remove any kind of identifying “labels” [i.e. change the name on your sign so nobody knows what you really are!].

Some “progressive” (?) Christians we know have said that “too much baggage goes with the term, ‘church of Christ.’” What they mean is that many understand that the term “church of Christ” is associated with people who believe we should partake of the Lord’s supper every first day of the week, that baptism is necessary for remission of sins, that there is “one body” or universal church of the saved, that there is a distinct organization for local churches, that Christians should sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in assembly worship and not play instruments, just to name a few. Because of what some in the world consider doctrine that is too “narrow,” these “progressives” believe that by dropping the name, “church of Christ,” we will somehow be able to remove an obstacle and convert more people.

Two quick points and we move on: First, there **is** Bible authority for the above mentioned practices (Acts 20:7; Acts 2:38; Eph. 1:22-23; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3; Eph. 5:19; I Cor. 14:15). Furthermore, whenever God *specifies how* He wants something done, all

other kinds are excluded concerning that matter! (For more information on this, see my pamphlet on *Is there a “pattern” in the New Testament that God wants us to follow?*)

Second, it is commendable that some are concerned about converting more people, and whenever obstacles stand in the way we should seek to remove them. Of course, anything that has to do with God’s will or truth is not a removable “obstacle.” Believing that Jesus is God’s Son is an “obstacle” for some, but can’t be “removed” if one is truly converted to Jesus (Jno. 8:24)! To the Jews, “Christ crucified” was “a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (I Cor. 1:23). Inspired men would not drop from their preaching what some then considered “too much baggage” to be converted (I Cor. 2:1-5).

However, there is a problem. I know of no one who has *ever* been “turned off” by the term “church of Christ,” but by what churches of Christ practice and teach, as mentioned above! Experience has shown a friend of mine this truth.

Baptists, Methodists, and many others have de-emphasized their distinctive denominational names and practices by two ways: One, they *emphasize* a generic and/or geographical location (with large letters on signs), and *de-emphasize* the



denominational name (with extremely small letters, usually at the bottom of their signs); Two, they omit any denominational tie altogether for something like Cross(T)Point. An example would be for us to change our name from *Elgin Hills Church of Christ* to simply ELGIN HILLS, or ELGIN HILLS CHURCH (or some kind of generic name that disguises what we really are!).

A simple internet search reveals reasons why many denominations go this route. Attracting more people and renouncing former distinctive doctrines are the primary reasons.

Sadly, some who formerly identified themselves as churches of Christ and preached and practiced what the New Testament authorized, no longer do so. It is good that they have changed their names; usually vague names indicate vague, indefinite, anything-goes teaching and practice.

### What about Labels?

Some say they don't like religious labels. Why? We like and even demand labels on everything else, and we don't like to be fooled by labels! We want labels to describe accurately the product they represent.

We understand what the terms (labels) "conservative" and "liberal" mean politically. They represent two completely divergent views toward the constitution and what the government is and is not authorized to do. If we are conscientious voters, we want to know what politicians stand for. Labels such as the above give a "big picture" of their overall thinking and how they will govern. We don't want to be tricked.



Imagine going into a grocery store and everything is *only* labeled "Food." This sums up what has happened with

so many religious groups simply having the name "Church." Such names as "Friendship Church" and "Valley Church" in Limestone County, give no idea what they teach or practice. In fact, from the marquee on one church sign below, one might believe it is associated with Catholics!

What if someone has been studying the Scripture, believes on Jesus Christ as God's Son, understands that people converted in the New Testament repented and were baptized (Acts 2:38), and he understands that baptism is a burial or immersion (Acts 8:36-38; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12), not sprinkling as some of his friends have suggested. He wants to be a part of a church that teaches and practices the truth on this subject. Years ago, he would have had no problem "finding" such a group. Now, people have made it more of a "mystery" due to their new and indefinite church signs. Of course, when religious groups take a "whatever-you-want-to-do" attitude, having a vague, indefinite name matches their practice!

Someone says, "A sign doesn't tell you everything." That's right. But at least it is a start. If I am looking for building supplies, I don't go to a store labeled "Winn Dixie." If I read where Jesus said, "Do not call anyone on earth your father" (Matt. 23:9), I would not begin looking for a church sign with "Catholic" on it!

Are there some people in churches of Christ who don't act like Christians? Absolutely. But just because some hypocrites claim to be members of the "church of Christ" doesn't mean that what is taught and practiced by many should be changed, or that the name should be changed. Some during the first century turned away from the truth (such as Demas, II Tim. 4:10). That did not mean that somehow Paul and others had to "re-identify" themselves to keep anyone from lumping Demas into the same bag with Paul and being "turned off" by the apostles!

Tertullus, a hired gun of an orator for Jewish accusers, called Paul "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5). Because he accused Paul of such did not

mean that true Christianity and the church of which Paul was a member constituted a “sect.” Paul answered “that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14). In essence, Paul said that what he was a member of was not a “sect” or “part” of anything. It was/is “everything” the Law and prophets predicted would come to pass in Jesus Christ! Likewise, some may call the “church of Christ” just another denomination. That doesn’t mean that genuine churches of (belonging to) Christ are such; it is only a false accusation, similar to Tertullus’ accusation of Paul. However, changing the name because of some misconceptions won’t help the situation!

**Is the phrase, “church of Christ,” the only designation local churches can use?**

For many years, churches seeking to duplicate New Testament Christianity put signs on their meeting houses with something like “Church of Christ,” or “The Church Of Christ at \_\_\_\_ meets here.” This was helpful for people both near and far to locate the place of assembly. However, some are saying that such signs are “denominational,” and that there is no one designation for God’s people in a local setting, as if they discovered a truth that nobody before them had learned.

We have preached that there is no one Bible designation for God’s people for years. We understand that there are *several* Bible phrases that describe God’s people. Some of these include “the body of Christ,” simply “the church,” “the house of God,” the church of God,” and a plurality of churches were sometimes identified as “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16). Obviously, one local congregation could accurately be called a “church of Christ.” At least we have preached that whatever term used should be a Bible term or phrase (see II Tim. 1:13).

If I spoke to a taught Christian and referred to another as a Christian, a member of “the church,” he wouldn’t ask, “Which one?” He would know that I spoke of the Lord’s church and *not* a denomination.

However, to someone who has not been taught, saying the same thing would leave him in the dark. He would likely ask, “Which one?” and he would be thinking in denominational terms! Therefore, it is necessary not only to use Scriptural phrases, but also Scriptural phrases that accurately identify ourselves to those with whom we speak.

The New Testament teaches that the church is married to Christ (Eph. 5:22-31). Its members were baptized “into Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Jesus Christ said He would build His church (Matt. 16:18). He is its head (Col. 1:17-18) as well as its foundation (I Cor. 3:10-11). He saved it (Eph. 5:23) as He purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:27; Eph. 1:7). Therefore, it is completely logical, non-denominational, accurate, and with Bible authority to refer to ourselves in a local collectively as a “church of Christ.” This simply means a church belonging to Christ.

**What motivates desires to change names for “churches of Christ”?**

I am certain that I don’t know why in every case. However, I have read a number of statements from Baptist “pastors” who have spoken for churches that dropped their denominational name for generic or geographical only designations. Their reasons center on not wanting to appear “judgmental,” “preachy,” and the fact that they no longer believe “Baptist doctrine.” I would hope that among people who are supposed to be duplicating New Testament Christianity, changing their names is not because they are ashamed of the gospel or anything it demands. Paul told Timothy, “Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God” (II Tim. 1:8). Remember, the gospel has appeared “foolish” to worldly minded people who glory in their own wisdom from the first century until now (I Cor. 1-2). Changing the message to accommodate the world will not convert anyone to Jesus. Rather than change the gospel to accommodate the world, we should seek to change the

world to accommodate the gospel.

We should never try to “hide,” disguise or camouflage *any* aspect of the Lord’s will, or what His will demands we practice! If the name, “church of Christ” calls to mind to some people, “that church that doesn’t have a piano,” or “that church that believes you should eat the Lord’s supper every Sunday,” or that church that believes you’ve got to be baptized to be saved,” wouldn’t you want to be identified with the true gospel, rather than assume an unknown or vague name? Think about it.

**(Editor’s Note:** Most brethren recognize the scriptural designation that a congregation may use on its sign is mostly a matter of judgment because the church is designated in a variety ways in the New Testament. If a congregation merely decided to put on it’s meeting house sign “Christians meet here,” or some other scriptural designation other than “Church of Christ,” it might not receive much attention from brethren in other places, were it not for the fact that the track record of those who have gone that route has not been good. For the most part, the changing of the designation is only the tip of the iceberg of deeper of more subtle changes in attitudes and even practices that go along with the name change. Hence, brother Owens’ observations should be given serious consideration.)

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## Alcohol Sales Outlets and Violence

**(The following is part of an article that appeared in *Science Daily*, 2/22/10 – EOB.)**

More alcohol sales sites in a neighborhood equate to more violence, and the highest assault rates associated with carry-out sites selling alcohol for off-premise consumption, according to a new research released February 21, but two Indiana University professors.

Using crime statistics and alcohol outlet licensing data from Cincinnati, Ohio, to examine the spatial relationship between alcohol outlet density and

assault density. Department Of criminal Justice Prof. William Alex Pridemore and Department of Geography professor Tony Grubestic found that off-premise outlets appeared to be responsible for about one in four simple assaults and one in three aggravated assaults.

The findings were released at a press briefing entitled “Using Geographic Information Systems And Spatial Analysis to Better Understanding Patterns and Causes of Violence” and presented as part of the February 18-22 annual meeting all the American Association for the Advancement of Science in San Diego, California.

“A higher density of alcohol sales outlets in an area means closer proximity and availability to an intoxicating substance for residents,” Pridemore said. “Perhaps just as importantly, alcohol outlets provide a greater number of potentially deviant places. Convenience stores licensed to sell alcohol may be especially troublesome in this regard, as they often serve not only as sources of alcohol, but also as local gathering places with little formal social control”

Using different suites of spatial regression models, the researchers found adding one off-premise alcohol sales site per square mile would create 2.3 more simple assaults and 0.6 more aggravated assaults per square mile. Increase in violence associated with restaurants and bars were smaller but still statistically significant, with 1.15 more simple assaults created when adding one restaurant per square mile, and 1.35 more simple assaults per square mile by adding one bar.

“We could expect a reduction of about one quarter in simple assaults and nearly 1/3 in aggravated assaults in our sample of Cincinnati block groups, were alcohol outlets removed entirely,” Grubestic noted, “these represent substantial reductions and clearly reveal the impact of alcohol outlet density on assault density in our sample.”