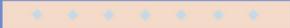




NO PROPER
NAME
GIVEN TO
CHRIST'S
ASSEMBLY



W.E. BEST

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**No Proper Name Given
to
Christ's Assembly**

**By
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Preface

Many have asked the question, “Why has South Belt Grace Church changed her name to South Belt Assembly of Christ?” The answer is simple—we believe the latter name to be more Biblically correct. Let it be understood that South Belt Assembly of Christ is nondenominational. We are neither affiliated with nor have we sympathy for such denominational institutions as the Assembly of God or the Church of Christ in either doctrine or practice. However, we will not be denied the use of correct Biblical terminology because of its use by such institutions. Since our Assembly is nondenominational, her pastor and members explore areas of Biblical truth that denominationally oriented churches ignore. Both pastor and members of South Belt Assembly of Christ desire to consider every aspect of Biblical doctrine. When error is detected by this Assembly, there is acknowledgment of growth in grace and knowledge by embracing the truth. Growth is evidence of spiritual health. The initial change in regeneration and conversion brings about a series of changes until the final change in glorification. Therefore, we offer some of the evidence of this growth by presenting this pamphlet entitled “No Proper Name Given To Christ’s Assembly.”

No Proper Name Given to Christ's Assembly

The English dictionary gives the following definition of the word "church": (1) a building for public worship, (2) an occasion of such worship, (3) the whole number of believers or of their organized bodies, (4) a Christian denomination, (5) an organized congregation forming part of a denomination, (6) the Christian faith, and (7) organized religion as a political or social order.

There are many organizations, but they differ vitally from Christ's assembly, an organism. Fraternal, racial, social, business, and military organizations are all built into a system which would fall to pieces were it not for the influence of outside powers. On the other hand, the *ekklesia* of Christ is distinct because she is operated from within. Her being indwelt by the Holy Spirit makes her an organism. Her members are in vital union with Jesus Christ, her living Head.

Christ spoke to an assembly—called-out ones—in a geographical setting, Caesarea Philippi, about the assembly that He shall continue to build. The *ekklesia* Christ is building includes all the called-out ones constituting the bride of Christ. This *ekklesia* will not be made up of an aggregation of local churches, denominations, sects, and cults. She will consist of a collection of called-out ones—the elect—from among Jews and

Gentiles, who God appointed to be the bride of Jesus Christ. Thus, the assembly is represented as being the “body,” “building,” and “bride” of Christ. Furthermore, the assembly is also depicted as a “dwelling-place (*katoiketerion*) of God through the Spirit” of which Jesus Christ is Architect, Foundation, Chief Cornerstone, and Builder. (See I Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:14-22; 5:22-32; I Pet. 2:4-6.)

The Greek noun *ekklesia* means a congregation or an assembly duly summoned. It came from *ekkaleo* (*ek*, out from within, and *kaleo*, to call or summon) and is translated “church,” except in Acts 19:32, 39, and 41, where it is rendered “assembly” in most translations of the New Testament. The singular form of *ekklesia* is used more than twice as many times as the plural form. Since there is no argument about the plural usage of *ekklesia* referring to local visible assemblies, are we forced to say that every time the single form is used it means an assembled assembly? Were the disciples effectually called before they assembled at Caesarea Philippi? Was Saul of Tarsus summoned by grace before he tried to be joined to the disciples (Acts 9:1-31)? Did the church at Jerusalem become an unassembled assembly (Acts 8:1-4)? Is an unassembled local assembly an assembly? Is there a distinction between “my church” (Matt. 16:18) and all “the churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16)?

The Greek noun *ekklesia* is used in the following ways in the New Testament: (1) There was an assembly of confused and riotous people who took

part in a demonstration while being ignorant of the issues involved in Ephesus (Acts 19:32-41). (2) Luke used the word to describe the Israelites in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). (3) The word is used in the sense of Christians assembling for the purpose of worship and edification (I Cor. 11:18; 14:19, 35). (4) The unassembled assembly from the Jerusalem assembly is described by the same word (Acts 8:1-4). (5) The word in Matthew 16:18 includes all the saints who were chosen to become members of Christ's royal priesthood, His holy nation, people for His possession, and His bride (I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 21:9). Christ did not say, "I shall continue building my churches," but "I shall continue building my church."

The *ekklesia* that Jesus Christ shall continue to build (progressive future active indicative verb—Matt.16:18) on the foundation that is being laid (present middle participle—I Cor. 3:11) is the building being fitted together (present passive participle—Eph. 2:21) into a dwelling place of God (Eph. 2:22). Therefore, Christ's work is a process that will continue until His "bride" is completed and prepared for the "Bridegroom." Jesus Christ is not building His "bride" the same way God brought the "Bridegroom" into the world. There was no process with the incarnation, because it was an act of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary, the virgin (Matt. 1:18-25; Heb. 10:5). The verb "prepared" of Hebrews 10:5 is an aorist middle indicative of *katartidzo*, which in the middle voice means to prepare for himself. The aorist tense is point action in past time, and the indicative mood

is the mood of reality. On the other hand, the process of building and preparing the bride has been continuing since the disciples, with whom Christ began, and shall continue until the last person appointed as a member of the bride shall be effectually called. Christ is not continuing to build the local visible assembly to whom He spoke in Caesarea Philippi. Furthermore, He did not use the word *ekklesia* abstractly because He had His completed bride in mind when He spoke.

Jesus Christ gave Simon Bar-jona a proper name, "...thou art Peter," following his confession; but He did not give the assembly, which He said "I will build" (*oikodomeso*, progressive future active indicative of *oikodomeo*, which means shall continue to build) a "proper" name (Matt. 16:18). Hence, the assembly is referred to as the "household of God" (Eph. 2:19), the "habitation of God" (Eph. 2:22), and "the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). The genitive case in the Greek, the case of description, describes the relation of the called-out ones to God. The statements, "the church of God which is at Corinth" (I Cor. 1:2), "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), "the church of the Thessalonians" (I Thess. 1:1), and "the churches...in Asia" (Rev. 1:11) describe their location, not their humanly devised theological systems.

Christ did not give the called-out ones a proper name because He is the Head of the assembly which He is building, and He is also the Head of the multiplicity of true assemblies. Christ being the Head of numerous assemblies is typified in the Israelites' worship. God chose the tent of meeting

as the place where He placed His name (Deut. 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26). To that place, the people of God were to bring their sacrifices, tithes, and offerings, and make their vows unto the Lord. As there was only one place in Israel where God set His name, the true assembly of Jesus Christ, wherever each one exists, is the only place in the world today where God sets His name. Christ as Head of His assembly has the sole right to give laws and institute ordinances for His called-out ones to observe. His will is the supreme guide; His word, the code of laws; and His glory, the ultimate end of His body. Therefore, no human hierarchy has any jurisdiction over the called-out ones who constitute His assembly.

Christ was given to be Head over all things to the assembly, and the assembly was given to Christ (John 17; Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:22-33). Adam, a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14), spoke of the woman whom the Lord gave him (Gen. 3:12), signifying that he was to be the exclusive head of the human race. All were to be derived from him. Therefore, it was necessary that woman should not have an independent but a derived existence, an existence that came from Adam as the head of humanity. (See I Tim. 2:9-15; I Cor. 11:2-16.) As that was true of Eve in a physical sense, it is true of the assembly in a spiritual sense. Christ is the source of the assembly which shall become His bride. Since Christ is the Head of the assembly, believers do not have an independent but a derived existence. A “deeper sleep” than the sleep that fell upon

Adam in the garden of Eden fell upon Christ at Calvary.

Christ's headship of His body does not demonstrate that authority in the local assembly is unnecessary, but it means that authority is delegated and subordinate. Local assembly officers are under the authority of Jesus Christ, the only Head of the assemblies. Delegated officers under Christ's authority must operate under the rules and limits set forth in Scripture. If these officers either fall short or go beyond Scripture, they are disobedient to their Head. Since the perfect assembly in eternity will be under government, how much more indispensable is government of imperfect believers in time. Hence, the proper administration of local assembly government is an absolute necessity for the unity of peace, purity, and edification of the local aspect of the assembly (Eph. 4:11-16).

Local assembly authority should never be self-centered or self-assumed. It is derived from the Head of all local assemblies. It is exercised over only the members of each local assembly. Those who have been Divinely delegated to such responsibility should never make laws of their own or act arbitrarily. Furthermore, their appointment by God will be recognized by spiritually minded people, but not by the local assembly member who is prejudiced, sentimental, or desirous of change because of having been rebuked for sin or lack of growth.

There are three major reasons why Christ's assembly was not given a proper name: (1) The

assembly which Christ is building is not only incomplete, but it is also imperfectly manifested in the multiplicity of local assemblies. (2) Terms like “the church of God” (Acts 20:28; I Cor. 1:2), “the churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16), and “church of the living God” (I Tim. 3:15) are not proper names. (3) Proper names of Christ’s assemblies are human inventions which represent departure from Biblical principles.

The assembly is not a human organization; it is the creation of God by the Spirit. Since the assembly of Christ is the body of regenerated and converted persons, no one can be on the side of Christianity without being on the side of Christ’s assembly which He is building. Christ’s assembly is one by virtue of the Divine life that binds her as Christ’s body to the one Head. As there is unity between the Father and the Son, there is unity between the Son of God as Head and His body, the assembly. God the Father is one, Christ the Mediator is one, and the Holy Spirit who unites us to Jesus Christ is one; therefore, one body represents the assembly Christ is building (Eph. 4:4). Moreover, the assembly is one body of whom Christ is the Head; one building, of which Christ is the one Cornerstone; one bride, of whom Christ will be the Bridegroom.

The assembly that Christ continues to build is one, not striving to be one. Thus, the “bride” of Jesus Christ is one as He is one. This assembly is the life principle of each local assembly. As Jesus Christ was visible but not absolutely manifested during His first advent, the assembly is visible but

not absolutely manifested in the local assemblies. Membership in the assembly that Christ continues to build is coterminous with salvation, but it cannot be said that membership in a local assembly is coterminous with salvation. Overstatement of the visible aspect of Christ's assembly leads to institutional salvation, and overstatement of the invisible aspect leads to excessive individualism.

The unity of the assembly Christ is building must not be transferred to the future completion of the assembly, as though there were no unity of "position" in the present. Present unity is that to which Paul referred: "Endeavouring to keep [*terein*, present active infinitive of *tereo*] the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). The invisible positional unity of the saved must be examined in her concrete, visible multiplicity of assemblies. Multiplicity is the disclosure of the one "essence" in many tangible assemblies. For example, revelation is intended to be understood to some degree by the elect. Although revelation enters into the understanding and experience of the elect, shadows are never cast on revelation by the incompleteness of our understanding and interpretation of God's perfect revelation. Moreover, our imperfect understanding and faulty interpretation in the multiplicity of local visible assemblies does not cast a shadow over the absolutely invisible unity of Christ's assembly. Christians strive for the unity of the faith in the local assemblies (Eph. 4:13).

As the love of God surpasses its various dimensions, the Divine invisible principle of life in Christ's assembly goes beyond the multiplicity of the visible assemblies of Christ. Christ's assembly and the assemblies of Christ do not indicate a dual actuality. The unity of Christ's assembly cannot be affected by the ignorance, inconsistency, and sin of the visible assemblies of Christ. Disorders affect the fellowship but not the unity which God gives. The threefold work of Jesus Christ in regard to His assembly assures us that the unity, which is imperfectly manifested in time, will be completely revealed in the kingdom. (1) Christ died for the assembly (Eph. 5:25). (2) He sanctifies and cleanses the assembly (Eph. 5:26). (3) He will present the assembly to Himself without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing (Eph. 5:27). The eschatological outlook does not leave room for a defeated attitude; it is a stimulus to live for Christ (I John 3:2-3).

The terms "church of God," "churches of Christ," and "church of the living God" (Acts 20:28; I Cor. 1:2; Rom. 16:16; I Tim. 3:15) are all in the genitive case in the Greek to describe the relation of those who have been effectually called to Jesus Christ. Since Christ did not give the assembly which He is building a "proper" name, names given to represent some man, ordinance, form of church polity, method of operation, system of doctrine, or religious movement are human inventions without Divine sanction.

Denominations are para-assembly organizations which become human hierarchies. What else

can one expect when men ignore Scripture and build illegitimate organizations to exalt their opinions? Hence, denominational religion takes precedence over Scripture, and it becomes the criterion by which everything, including Scripture, is measured. Therefore, the humanly perpetuated hierarchy seeks to control the teaching and giving by its respective local institutions for the growth and development of the denomination. The hierarchy has its “watch dogs” to keep everyone in line. They are called by different names, such as bishops, district superintendents, district missionaries, etc. Since they are working for their respective denominations, they must protect their “meal tickets.” They will fight to the “last ditch” for their denominations, but they will not lift a finger to defend Biblical doctrine of which they know very little, if any. Such men are piously tolerant when it comes to Scripture but intolerant when it comes to their respective denominations. People are intolerant with anyone or anything that is an enemy of that which takes first place in their affections.

When religionists refuse to accept the truth that the assembly and her multiplicity of assemblies belong to Jesus Christ, they give proper names to their religious institutions. Thus they deny that Christ’s assembly—for whom He died, called-out, and commissioned to be the support and foundation of the truth—is sufficient to meet the need of the elect. The assembly and the multiplicity of local assemblies in the world were never designed to be social centers, theaters for

dramas, pageants, music festivals, sports events, etc. All religious institutions that promote such things are apostate organizations. Like the church at Laodicea, Jesus Christ is on the outside of them. They use the name of Jesus Christ only for the purpose of deceiving people. There is not enough truth in such institutions to attract the elect of God to the “voice” of the Savior (John 10).

Scripture gives no support to such names as Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, Church of England, Church of Scotland, Baptist, Congregational, Community, Pentecostal, Reformed, etc. “Roman Catholic” means universal in extent, but universalism nullifies Roman, which pertains to the ancient city of Rome, Italy. “Presbyterian” is based on a form of church government. “Episcopalian” adheres to the episcopal form of church government. “Methodist” comes from an excessive use of methods. “Lutheran” is an adherent to the teaching of Martin Luther. The “Churches of England and Scotland” are state churches. “Baptist” is a denomination that baptizes believers by immersion. “Community” is a social group residing in a specific locality. “Pentecostal” pertains to any religious group that emphasizes the activity of the Holy Spirit. The list could be extended, but the names mentioned should suffice to make the point clear that something vital is missing.

The assembly Jesus Christ and the apostles were building had an altar (the altar of burnt offering—John 1:29; I Cor. 5:7; Heb 10:10-14—Christ sacrificed for the sheep), but there were no

animal sacrifices. All having welcomed (received or accepted) Peter's message concerning Jesus Christ were baptized, but there were no Baptists.

John the Baptist means John the baptizer or identifier. To find a word that will apply to every aspect of the term baptism or baptize is not difficult, but the inclusive word does not destroy the various distinctions of the term. There are nine different usages of the more than one hundred references to the term baptism or baptize, and the term identifier fits all nine of them. Therefore, John's baptism identified repentance (Matt. 3:8). Christ was baptized by John to identify Himself with the work to which He had been appointed by the Father (Matt. 3:13-17). Christ baptized His own in the Spirit thus identifying Jews and Gentiles in His body; Christ's baptizing in fire is identification with judgment, etc. If Christians should call themselves Baptists because they observe the ordinance of baptism by immersion in water, why not call themselves "Breakers of Bread" or "Drinkers of Wine" because they observe the ordinance of the Lord's supper? Believers calling themselves by some ordinance, even though the ordinance is Scripturally observed, is folly. The early Christians had methods in their assembly meetings, but there were no Methodists. The early assemblies had elders, bishops, and undershepherds; but there were no Presbyterians or Episcopalians. All the first century believers had been born of the Spirit and baptized by Christ in the Spirit, but there were no Pentecostals. The statement "born of the Spirit"

of John 3:8 cannot be equated with the statement “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” of I Corinthians 12:13. This is proved as follows: (1) In John 3:8, the perfect passive participle of *gennaō* means “having been born,” and the preposition *ek*, the ablative of source, means “of.” (2) In I Corinthians 12:13, the preposition *en*, the locative of sphere (not the instrumental of means), means “in”; the aorist passive indicative (completed action past time—at Pentecost) of *baptidzo* means “were baptized”; and the preposition *eis*, accusative of purpose, means “into.” Hence, the former is better translated, “Having been born of the Spirit,” and the latter, “For indeed in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” Conclusively, believers are incorrect to carry a name that sends a wrong message.

Although there are religious institutions carrying names that seem to honor the Scripture, such as Assembly of God, Church of God, Church of Christ, etc., one must not be deceived by a name assumed by any unscriptural organization. For example, Isaiah said, “...seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name to take away our reproach” (Is. 4:1). This is a good analogy to what is taking place among religionists. After all, false teachers can more easily deceive when they use the name of the Lord. James admonishes us not to be deceived—(1) about God (James 1:13-18), (2) about ourselves (James 1:22), and (3) about religion (James 1:26).

The proper use of Biblical terminology is important. Many times one hears the question, “What is in a name?” Then they say, “Sardis had a name that she lived but she was dead” (Rev. 3:1). (Greek translation—“...you have a name that you are living and you are dead.”) According to the context, the deadness of Sardis was not absolute. As long as there are a few believers in the local aspect of the assembly, she is not absolutely dead. There is great meaning in the word “name” when it relates to God. The disciples baptized in the “name” of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christianity embraces the doctrine of the Trinity. The union of all three names by the use of the singular “name” proves that all three Persons in the Godhead are equal—one times one times one equals one. The threefold name of Jesus Christ our Lord describes one Person, Savior of the elect and Mediator between God and men. He has been given a name above every name. Therefore, if we love doctrine more than Jesus Christ, we are rationalists. If we love forms or ceremonies more than Christ, we are ritualists. If we love our works more than Christ, we are legalists. If we love the local aspect of the assembly more than Christ, we are sectarians. If we love our experiences more than Christ, we are emotionalists.

Christians have been betrothed to Jesus Christ in time (II Cor. 11:2-4). According to Jewish custom, the betrothal (engagement) period—the first part of the two part Jewish marriage contract—was the time for the young woman to be prepared for the consummation of marriage. In II

Corinthians 11, Paul's metaphor was never meant to advocate that a young woman live with her future husband before the consummation of marriage, but she was to be faithful to the one to whom she was engaged. As the assembly at Corinth had been betrothed to Christ by Paul, each local aspect of Christ's assembly has been betrothed to Christ. Paul's concern was the interval between betrothal and marriage. He did not want the Corinthian believers to be hindered by false teaching during the time of preparation. Any unfaithfulness on the part of the Corinthian believers between betrothal and marriage would have been spiritual fornication because the betrothal period was as binding as the wedding itself. Since Christians belong to Christ by election, redemption, regeneration, and conversion, we are to be progressively sanctified until the consummation of the marriage in eternity.

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