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# Words of Truth

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## What Should We Call Ourselves?

*By: Brian A. Yeager*

Something has puzzled me for a number of years. First, I wonder why I so often refer to myself as a “Christian” and a member of “the church of Christ”. These are not the only terms in the Scriptures that are used to identify those whom are in Christ. In fact, they are not commonly used in the Scriptures at all. This is not news to me as I am sure it is not news to most whom will read this article. I am not seeking to write something here to challenge the usage of the terms “Christian” or “church of Christ”.

In the Scriptures, the word “Christian” is used twice in the King James Version (Acts 26:28 and I Peter 4:16). Once we find the word “Christians” (Acts 11:26). We once read of multiple congregations being called “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16). Therefore, there is authority to refer to myself as a “Christian” as well as a member of “the church of Christ”.

The question is NOT if these terms are Scriptural. The question I am asking myself, you, and for our studies is if they are the most expedient or not. We know that all things we say and do need to be authorized by Christ implicitly or explicitly (Matthew 4:4, Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 6:46, I Corinthians 4:6, Ephesians 5:10, Colossians 3:17, and II John 1:9). We find such authority by direct instructions (John 15:10), approved biblical examples (I Corinthians 11:1), and certainly by things inferred (Matthew 22:23-33). In addition to what we say needing to be lawful; they must also be expedient, edifying, and to the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:23-33). So, let’s begin our study by seeing what the Scriptures call us as individuals and as a body.

## What Terms Are Used In The English Translation Of The Scriptures?

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, faithful followers of the Lord are often called “saints” (Deuteronomy 33:1-3, I Samuel 2:9, II Chronicles 6:41, Psalms 16:3, Psalms 30:4, Psalms 31:23, Psalms 34:9, Psalms 37:28, Psalms 50:5, Psalms 52:9, Psalms 79:2, Psalms 85:8, Psalms 89:5, Psalms 89:7, Psalms 97:10, Psalms 106:16, Psalms 116:15, Psalms 145:10, Psalms 148:14, Psalms 149:1, Psalms 149:5, Psalms 149:9, Proverbs 2:8, Daniel 7:18, Daniel 7:21-27, Daniel 8:13, Hosea 11:12, Zechariah 14:5, Matthew 27:52, Acts 9:13, Acts 9:32, Acts 9:41, Acts 26:10, Romans 1:7, Romans 8:27, Romans 12:13, Romans 15:25-31, Romans 16:1-2, I Corinthians 1:2, I Corinthians 6:1-2, I Corinthians 14:33, I Corinthians 16:1, I Corinthians 16:15, II Corinthians 1:1-4, II Corinthians 9:1, II Corinthians 9:12, II Corinthians 13:13, Ephesians 1:15-18, Ephesians 2:19, Ephesians 3:18, Ephesians 4:12, Ephesians 5:3, Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 1:1, Philippians 4:21-22, Colossians 1:2, Colossians 1:4, Colossians 1:12, Colossians 1:26, I Thessalonians 3:13, II Thessalonians 1:10, etc.). There are about 101 times in which we find “saint” or “saints” in the Scriptures.

The plural term “disciples” appears 244 times in the Scriptures. Starting in Isaiah 8:16 through Acts 21:16 we see this term used to describe followers of the Lord. The singular term “disciple” is used 29 times, of which are all in the New Testament, from Matthew 10:24 through Acts 21:16. Followers of the Lord are called “brethren” (Matthew 23:8). Followers of the Lord have been called “the faithful” (Psalms 31:23, Ephesians 1:1, etc.). We find terms such as “faithful brethren” (Colossians 1:2), “holy brethren” (I Thessalonians 5:27), “brethren in the Lord” (Philippians 1:14), “beloved brethren” (I Corinthians 15:58), etc. The term “elect” appears at least 20 times and is in both covenants (Isaiah 42:1, Isaiah 45:4, Colossians 3:12, etc.).

Since I am quickly running out of space to write, I will add one more point that should suffice to make the point clear. There are MANY terms, of which we haven’t even began to list, that believers (Acts 5:14) have been called in the Scriptures which were used much more often than the term “Christian”. From that, let’s talk about terms that are used to describe Christians in a collective manner.

When saints/disciples/Christians/the elect, etc. assemble, we may Scripturally be recognized as “the church of God” (Acts 20:28, I Corinthians 1:2, I Corinthians 10:32, I Corinthians 11:22, I Corinthians 15:9, II Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:13, and I Timothy 3:5). We could be recognized as the “church of [a location]” (i.e. Acts 8:1, Acts 11:22, Acts 13:1, Romans 16:1, I Thessalonians 1:1, II Thessalonians 1:1, Revelation 2:18, Revelation 3:1, and Revelation 3:14). We could be called the “church of the firstborn” (Hebrews 12:22-23), “the body of Christ” (I Corinthians 12:27; cf. Ephesians 4:4 and Colossians 3:15), “the church” (Acts 2:47, Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18, and Colossians 1:24), and “the house of God” or “the church of the living God” (I Timothy 3:15). I am not even saying that is a complete list. However, it does make a big point. The phrase “church of Christ” appears nowhere. The phrase “churches of Christ” appears just once. Think about that.

### **Why Do I [We] Use Terms Least Used Compared To Others?**

I have thought about why I use the terms “Christian” and “the church of Christ” more than I do other authorized terms many times. I know it is lawful to be called “the church of God”, but I also know that very few people would understand that Christ is God (Romans 9:1-5). Thus, I know that terminology is not necessarily expedient. The same is true with “church of the firstborn”, etc. Jesus built His church (Matthew 16:13-18). He founded us (Hebrews 3:1-6). Being called “the church of Christ” does clearly note such. Most would not understand what the term “elect” means and “brethren” is very general and could even speak as to those related in the flesh (Matthew 13:55). Most understand what “Christian” is intended to mean. Thus, I know I often use the terms I think are clearest for a reason (II Corinthians 3:12).

### **Conclusion**

Human traditions are dangerous (Mark 7:1-9). Let’s always test why we do things and only do what is right (I Thessalonians 5:21). Let’s not hold to something because we’re accustomed to doing or saying it. Additionally, let’s not fear expanding our vocabulary when it is lawful **and** expedient to do so. This is a challenge for us in our continued growth.