

# Does God Care How The Church Is Designated?

## Bible Answers About The Church

In fulfillment of God's eternal plan (Eph. 3:10-11) the church was born. Jesus fulfilled His promise to build the church (Matt. 16:18) on the first day of Pentecost after His resurrection. From Acts chapter two on the church that Jesus built almost becomes the center of focus. Churches belonging to the Lord began to spring up in city after city throughout the Roman Empire. How was this church designated in the Scriptures?

A careful reading of the New Testament will reveal designations that can be divided into three groups. These designations were used with real meaning, expressing function, ownership, and relationship. These designations were given by divine direction and fulfill a divine purpose. Let's take note of them.

Three designations given to the church relate to the function of the church as a body or an organism. These designations highlight what the Lord's church is in purpose, design, and action.

The church Christ established is referred to simply as **"the church"** (Col. 1:18). The term "church" means people who have become followers of the Lord. They are referred to in: (1) An assembled sense (when Christians have assembled, I Cor. 11:18); (2) A local sense (a church in a particular area, I Cor. 1:2); (3) A regional sense (churches in a province, I Cor. 16:1); (4) and in a universal sense (embracing all Christians for all time, Eph. 5:23). The "church" is simply people redeemed by the blood of Christ, who live for Him, and do His work.

The church is referred to as **"the body of Christ"** (Eph. 1:22-23). This phrase stresses the function as well as the relationship of the church. The "church" is the spiritual body of Christ on earth, and it is related to Christ as a body is to its head. Individual Christians are said to function as "members of the body" (I Cor. 12:27).

Third, the church is referred to as **"the kingdom"** (Acts 8:12). Sometimes the designation is "the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:18-19); and sometimes it is "the kingdom of God" (Acts 8:12; Jno. 3:3). Both phrases reflect the spiritual nature of the dominion and rule of the church/kingdom (Jno. 18:36). In other words, the church or kingdom is a body of people who have submitted to the rule of God upon the earth (I Cor. 15:24-25). The church has a divine head or king, and is governed by divine authority.

Two designations found in the New Testament emphasize the possession-type of relationship that the church sustains to God and Christ. These designations suggest ownership and leadership:

The church is referred to as **“the church of Christ”** (Rom. 16:16). This designation emphasizes the church’s ownership and the church’s identity. The church is the church of Christ because Christ founded it, purchased it, owns it, and serves as its head. When we are converted to Christ, we belong to Him (I Cor. 6:19-20). We become so completely identified with Christ that we are called Christians, meaning followers of Christ (Acts 11:26; 26:28; I Pet. 4:16).

Second, the church is referred to as **“the church of God”** (I Cor. 1:2). Since Jesus stated that He and the Father are one, we are not surprised to find the church referred to as the “church of God.” After all, God planned the church before the foundation of the world (Eph. 3:10-11) and sent Christ into the world to prepare for the church and to purchase it with His blood (Acts 20:28).

Several designations in the New Testament stress the idea of relationship. This is to be expected, since being a member of the Lord’s church involves various relationships.

The church is referred to as **“the family of God”** (Eph. 2:19; I Tim. 3:15). At our conversion to Christ, God adopted us as His children, giving us family privileges and making us heirs with Christ of eternal life (Rom. 8:15-17; Eph. 1:5). We have a heavenly Father to pray to and a loving Savior, our elder brother, to pray through. We have brothers and sisters to love and look to for encouragement and support (Mk. 10:30).

Second, the church is referred to as **“the disciples of the Lord”** (Acts 9:1), suggesting the continual relationship that exists between the Christian and the Lord as a learner and follower (2 Pet. 3:18).

Third, the church is referred to as **“the temple of God”** (Eph. 2:21; I Cor. 3:16). The church as an assembly of Christians forms a dwelling place for God. Therefore, God’s sanctuary today is a living body, the church.

Fourth, the church is referred also as **“the church of the first-born”** (Heb. 12:23). Literally, this is the church of the first-born ones who are enrolled in heaven. The church sustains a unique relationship to the future because each member of the church is enrolled in heaven and therefore the future does not hold fear and forebodings because of the eternal hope Christ gives to each one.

These designations identify, characterize, and describe the church, the people of God. God’s planning from eternity past, the earthly ministry of Jesus, and Jesus’ sacrificial death on Calvary are all fulfilled in the establishment of the church. Surely the church is precious to God. Do we dare designate His church in some way other than the ways God chose and revealed to us? The human names designating denominational churches are of human wisdom rather than God’s wisdom and violate the Scriptures.

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