

Some of these churches wear the names of their founders, some are named for the day on which they worship, or after some belief or practice that is peculiar to them. These churches have all kinds of terms for membership, they worship in different ways (some of which are more attuned to entertainment than to worship of God), and just about everything imaginable is taught and practiced by them. And the amazing thing is that all of this is done in the “name” of Christ, with each one expecting the Lord to give His approval to these many kinds of “religious” teachings and practices — most of which have no foundation in Scripture at all.

How sad for the so-called Christian world to be so divided and mixed up, making a mockery of the Lord and His way, minimizing the importance of His teaching, and belittling His sacrifice for the church itself. Because of the way man has changed things and turned them around, “organized religion” amounts to nothing more than a big joke in the minds of many. The result of so much division, confusion, and contradiction is that masses of people, worldwide, have rejected religion altogether.

But nothing about the corruption of organized religion is “funny” when you stop to realize that all of the people in religious error will be lost

because they have added to God’s word or they have subtracted from it (Revelation 22:18,19). And they will cause countless others to be lost because their followers have been deceived by their false teachings. Jesus, Himself, warned in Matthew 7:21-23, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”*

Those who would find fault with the Lord and His church, and with anything that He teaches, will live to regret it — actually, they will *die* to regret it — and there is nothing funny about that.

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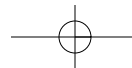
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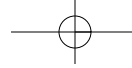
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# Don't Ever Belittle the Church

J.C. Choate





## Don't Ever Belittle the Church

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Have you ever heard anyone say, “One church is just as good as another”? Or “You don’t have to be a member of any church to be saved. Just repeat ‘The Sinner’s Prayer’ and you’ll be alright.” Or, worse, have you heard people belittle and mock “organized religion” as a farce, because of all the division and confusion in the teachings and practices of the religious world?

Before you get too caught up in rejection of the idea of “church”, think with me a moment: Did you know that the church is called **the bride of Christ**? Marriage is a common and well-understood thing throughout the world. A man chooses one special woman to become his bride. He marries her. He gives her his name. He lives to protect her, to provide for her needs, to love her — and if he loves her enough, and if the need arises, he will die to save her. If necessity separates them for a time, his paramount thought is returning to her.

As the bride of Christ, the church is the church of Christ, and the children of the union are “Christians”. Just as in physical marriage, no husband would allow his wife to wear the name or names of countless other men, the bride

— church — of Christ is to wear her Husband’s name: “*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is **no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved***” (Acts 4:12). “*And the disciples were first called **Christians in Antioch***” (Acts 11:26)

The bride is to love and obey her husband, “*If you love Me, keep My commandments*” (John 14:15). The clarification is further emphasized in Galatians 1:8: “*... even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.*” The many doctrines and creeds created by men to govern the churches they have started are in direct violation of this Scripture.

The parallel between human marriage and the marriage of Christ and His church is beautifully described in Ephesians 5:22-33, where the church is urged to love and obey Christ, where the love and care of Christ for His bride are held up as examples to the human couple, and where the willingness of Christ to lay down His life for His bride — because of His great love for her — is described. The relationship is worded in this way: “*Christ also loved the church and **gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water*** [baptism] *by **the word*** [in strict accordance with the

Scriptures], *that He might **present her to Himself*** [He is coming again, to receive His bride to Himself] *a glorious church* [singular, one unified body, not thousands of denominations], *not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*”

From this parallel between Christ and His church, and a husband and wife, we can see that there is a very special relationship between the church and her Husband. He would be greatly offended if anyone mocked or belittled His bride — the very body of people for whom He gave His life on the cross. That blood makes the church a sacred institution, to be loved and honored, as the spiritual body over which Christ is the spiritual Head.

But there are many in the religious world who attempt to reduce the church to nothing more than a man-made organization which is of no importance. They will tell you that it is not necessary to even be a member of it to go to heaven. To justify all of these denominations, some explain that by putting all of them together, under a big “umbrella”, you end up with the church that we can read about in the Bible. Others go to John 15 and say that Christ is the vine and that the branches of that vine are the different denominational churches.

