

The Nameless Road

From Highway 1431 toward Lake Travis, numerous county roads lead into the juniper, oak, and cedar elm covered hills and valleys. One of those roads is Nameless Road.

Not knowing the origin of that name, we can suppose that some earlier map-maker made note of a wagon road having no designation because of its insignificance. Then perhaps the next cartographer years later decided that it was important enough to need a name, so he changed it from a nameless road to Nameless Road. And now that is its name.

The first time I saw that road sign and each time since, I have thought of our efforts to be a nameless church. That is a vain aspiration as long as we are a separate group. In order to distinguish ourselves as a separate group, we have given ourselves the name "Church of Christ." To name is to denominate, and to denominate is to recognize that we are a separatist part of the whole church. That makes us a denomination. Horrors! We cannot admit that! If we deny being just a part of the church and claim to be the whole, that fits the definition of a sect. Even worse!

We have been afraid to look in the mirror and see what we actually are. So we deny that "Church of Christ" is a name saying it is only one of the various descriptions of the nameless church. Why, then, do none of our buildings have any of the other descriptions like "Church of God" on its sign? Simple! That is not the name we have chosen to denominate ourselves. If you search the Yellow Pages for our telephone numbers, you will not find even one of them under "Church of God" or any other such heading. That is not the name we have chosen to identify ourselves.

As we discussed two weeks ago, all who are baptized by the direction of the Spirit are baptized into one body which is the church, the forgiven, the assembly, the congregation. But the Spirit has not, by baptism or any other method, put one into the Christian Church, Methodist Church, Church of Christ (or any division of the Church of Christ), Assembly of God, or any other such separate group. We join those groups either formally or by association. None are saved because they are in those groups but some may be saved in spite of it. After being added to the one body / church, persons may choose to serve God in those local groups without rejecting the saved ones in other groups. There are defects in every group. One may serve God in a group which is imperfect, like those in Corinth, while disapproving its recognizable defects. That is the only course any of us has to choose from. All humans and any group of humans serving together, whether organized, unorganized, or disorganized has defects both individually and collectively.

After telling Roman disciples how to deal with one another harmoniously with differing opinions and convictions (Rom 14), Paul offered an exhortation too long ignored: "*Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God*" (Rom 15:7). We do not sin when we welcome others whose defects differ from ours, but we do sin when we reject them in our self-righteousness. To our relief, no one is saved

by being in a perfect church but by being in him who is perfect and accounts his perfection to us.

In an effort to avoid the use of “Church of Christ” as a proper name, some began to refer to our groups as the “church of Christ.” But just as nameless road became Nameless Road, church of Christ becomes Church of Christ -- a name -- and good grammar calls for proper nouns and names to be capitalized. I had thought that illogical maneuver had about faded away, but instead, lately I am seeing it being used increasingly in journals and publications by people who should know better. I suspect that when the average citizen sees “church of Christ” referring to a group at a certain location, he thinks it is a typo or that the writer is ignorant of grammar or off centered.

When “church of Christ” is used, everyone in our groups understands that it is a proper name for our group as it is identified historically, in deeds, papers of incorporation, letterheads, and telephone directories. When that term is used, none of us thinks it refers to assemblies of Catholics, Baptists, or any others who are not of the separatist group of the one using the term. It is an “in house” expression by which we wish to convey the idea that, when we were baptized into one body, we were baptized into our particular divided segment of the forgiven ones.

If “church of Christ” is being used to indicate the one “non-denominational” body of all the save ones, then why do we reject all of them except those of our own separatist groups?

I am reading of conciliatory discussions among those of our historical heritage. Some are reported as involving persons of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Church (Independent), and church of Christ. If the church of Christ is the one, universal body, then it is implying that those in the first two groups are denominations and the church of Christ is not, which may be a wee bit insulting for those of less gracious attitude. Otherwise, the implication is that they are in the universal body of the saved but are being rejected by us in the same body. Hardly a recommended manner in which to approach discussion of unity!

If those involved are of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Church (Independent), and Church of Christ they are on equal footing as members of separatist denominational bodies serving in the one body – the universal congregation of those redeemed. With this in mind, those involved can agree that, in their obedience to the gospel, the Lord added them to the same body with all the saved, and admit that they each then joined a separatist group, a denomination. So they can “*Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God*”! While we may grant that religious groups may choose to accept or reject other groups, God’s congregation is composed of individuals rather than groups. Unity is individual fellowship of all saved individuals – all who are in Christ.

The “church of Christ,” like the “nameless road,” that became Nameless Road, has become the Church of Christ. Let us wear that name with humility. []

(Cecil Hook: December 2004)

P. S.: Because of the distractions that the holidays bring to both you and me, I plan to skip the mailouts for the next two weeks. So I send you Texas sized wishes for a MERRY CHRISTMAS and a HAPPY NEW YEAR hoping to connect with you again the first week of 2005. Thank you for tolerating my intrusions through 2004.