

WHAT IS DENOMINATIONALISM?

Intro.

1. We are warned against following the teachings of men – Gal. 1:6-11.
 - a. We must accept & speak words of God (1 Pet. 4:11); Abide in doctrine of Christ (2 Jno. 9-11); and test all things (1 Ths. 5:21-22; 1 Jno. 4:1, 6).
 - b. All things not of God will be uprooted – Matt. 15:13-14.
2. The wisdom of man promotes denominationalism (“choose the church of your choice”).
3. The wisdom of God promotes unity in Christ based on His word – **Jno. 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3.**
4. One such teaching of men is denominationalism.
5. Denominationalism recognizes many bodies, many teachings & many paths to God, while attempting unity in spite of moral & doctrinal diversity. Such will never work – only cause more division! Amos 3:3; 1 **Jno. 1:6-7**; Matt. 7:21-23

I. ITh~DERSTANDING DENOMINATIONALISM.

A. Denominations Are Sects, the Result of Division.

1. To denominate – “The act of naming; a class or kind having a specific name; a religious sect” (Webster’s). **To distinguish by a name.**
 - a. Denomination – *Apart, party, segment.*
 - b. Denominationalism – The result; “division into denominations.”

2. In denominationalism there is NOT UNITY in name, organization, doctrine or practice.. .or at times, even in spirit! *Based on division!*

B. The Nature of **Denominationalism** Shows It Does Not Produce the Church of the NT:

1. “Factions, divisions, parties” (ASV) are works of the flesh – **Gal. 5:20,21.**
2. There is oneness in Christ (“*One body...faith... baptism...*” **9 Eph. 4:4-6.**
3. Every denomination begins out of *division* & is perpetuated by its *distinction* from other believers!

C. **Attempted** Justification of Denominationalism From the Scriptures: **Jno. 15:1-8.** 1. Vine & branches is equated with Christ being divided into denominations. **But:**

- a. The Vine is Christ, not the Church. For denom. to be valid, the (univ.) Church is the vine, and its subdivisions (denominations) are the branches!
- b. 15:2 – If denominationalism is valid, then 15:2 authorizes the removal of unfruitful denominations!
- c. 15:3 – Christ spoke to disciples, not denominations.
- d. 15:4-8 – The disciple is in view here, not denominations (*you, him, anyone, he, my, disciples*).

II. WHAT DENOMINATIONALISM DOES.

A. It Promotes Division — **1 Cor. 1:10-13.**

1. “Denomination” separation, division, but *Christ is not divided*— **1 Cor. 1:13.**
2. Denominational use of “Church” not in N.T.
 - a. Denomination is larger than the local church, yet smaller than the universal church.

b. Universal church is composed of Christians, not of “churches!”

B. It Redefines the Church.

“The one, (John 17:20-21; Eph. 4:3-6) true, holy (I Cor. 3:16-17) church (Matt. 16:17-18; I Cor. 1:2; Eph. 2:18-19;! Pet. 2:9-10) is very broad, and includes all those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.” (A Christ Walk Church Statement of Faith, <http://mb-soft.com/cwalk/walk2.html>)

1. It ignores the singularity and uniqueness of the true church –Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4. (By establishing many bodies teaching conflicting doctrines that are antagonistic to Bible & each other.)

2. It ignores the church’s relationship to Christ –**Eph. 5:23-24.** (It is spiritual polygamy!)

C. It Denies the Importance of the Church .Acts 20:28 (*blood*); **Eph. 1:22-23** (*body of Christ*); 2:16 (*reconciled*); **3:10-11** (*eternal purpose*); 5:23 (*saved*); 5:32 (*bride*).

D. It Consents to the Choices of Men Above the Word & Will of God.

1. “*Join the church of your choice*” is the rallying cry of denominationalism.

2. Wrong thinking **Jer. 10:23; Prov. 16:25; Isa. 55:8.**

-Naaman was angry at God’s way -2 Kgs. 5:11; Jeroboam’s religion perverted .1 **Kgs. 12:26-30.**

3. No difference in these: “**Choose the (river) (God) (*churchi* of your choice)**”!

E. It Is Built Upon Man’s Sincerity Rather Than God’s Absolute Truth.

1. While sincere hearts are essential .Not enough to please God.

2. Acts 23:1; 26:9; 1 **Tim. 1:13** .If sincerity enough, why did Saul have to change? He would have been saved without change!

3. Must abide in truth to be saved –**Jno. 8:31-32.**

F. It Ignores the Divine **Standard of Unity, the Truth of God** (Jno. 17:17).

1. Jno. 17:20-21 –cf. the truth of Deity’s unity (10:30). [“Word”]

2. “All read from the same Bible. ..all are going to the same place.” No, this is spiritual deception! –**Matt. 7:21-23**

G. It Approves Making Laws **Where God Has Not Made Them** .**Gal. 1:6-9; Cot. 3:17.**

1. Creeds of men vs. inspired word of God -2 **Tim. 3:16-17.**

2. Ex. Sprinkling vs. burial (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12).. .Which is right?!

H. It Elevates Man’s Desire Above the Lord’s Stated Will.

1. Man’s choices vs. God’s revealed will! (Matt. 16:18)

2. The Lord’s word is superior to any desire of man –Matt. 28:18.

III. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT A DENOMINATION (Distinct/unique from churches of men)

A. Due to its Nature, the Church of Christ is Not a Denomination.

1. Built by Jesus, not man; Belongs to Jesus, not man –**Matt. 16:18.**

2. It is the body of Christ, who is its head –**Eph. 1:22-23**; Christ has only one body –**Eph. 4:4.**

3. Christ prayed for unity which reflects the unity of the **Godhead— Jno. 17:20-21.**

4. The church of Christ is distinct & unique from the churches of men!

B. But Someone Responds: “The church of Christ is also a denomination.”

1. People tend to reach conclusions based on previous experiences/understanding (Matt.

16:13-14).

Acts 24:14 –Gospel is “the Way” –Does not produce a sect!!

C. The Church of Christ is Not a **Denomination Because:**

1. Jesus did not build a denomination –Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28; **1 Pet. 1:19.**
2. It is possible to be a member of the church Jesus established –**Acts 2:41, 47.**
3. The apostles were not members of a denomination –**1 Cor. 1:13; 3:4.**
4. One can be a Christian today w/o belonging to a denomination –**Acts 2:47; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:16-18.**

Conclusion

1. “Denominations are man-made institutions that neither are recognized in, nor sanctioned by, the Word of God.” (Bert Thompson, *Reason & Revelation*, 1/98).
2. No man died to purchase/save the church: Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:~5).
3. We do not claim that churches of Christ belong to a better denomination, or the best denomination, but that there is only one church –the church that belongs to Christ!
4. Matt. 7:24-27 –The fall of denominationalism will be great! (v. 22-23)

VII. CHURCHES OF TODAY

CHURCH OF CHRIST	33 A.D.	JERUSALEM	CHRIST
ROMAN CATHOLIC	606 A. D.	ROME	
LUTHERAN	1520 A.D.	GERMANY	
EPISCOPALIAN.	1534 A.D.	ENGLAND	
PRESBYTERIAN		1536’ A.D. _I_ SWITZ	
		ERLAND	
CONGREGATIONAL	1550 A.D.	ENGLAND	
BAPTIST	1607 A.D.	HOLLAND	
METHODIST	1739A.D.	ENGLAND	
LATTER DAY SAINTS (Mormons)	1830 A.D.	AMERICA	
SEVENTH DAY	1830_ A.D.	AMERICA	
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE	1866 A.D.	AMERICA	
JEHOVAH’S WITNESS	1872 A.D.	AMERICA	
A.M.E.(Methodist) [1816 A.D.		AMERICA	
CHURCH OF GOD (Missouri Gr)	1671 A.D.	AMERICA	
CHURCH OF GOD (Indiana Gr.)	1880 A.D.	AMERICA	
CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST	1897 AD.	AMERICA	

All facts presented above may be verified by anyone visiting a public library, and carefully examining a few history books.

Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free". [Jo. 8:32] However, no one is free unless he has a choice, and no one can have a choice unless he knows the truth. Therefore, a person must be willing to set aside all prejudices which will block out the truth, and allow someone to teach him the truth. But like Pilate, we must be very careful in our search for the truth. However, when we find the truth, we must not do as Pilate did, for he learned the truth but did not appreciate it.

In order to verify which of the above churches in Christ's church, we must accept the Bible as our infallible guide to heaven. The apostle Paul said, "All scriptures are given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instructions in righteousness". [II Tim. 3:16].

"FOLLOWING JESUS WITHOUT DENOMINATIONALISM"

Why Is Denominationalism Wrong?

INTRODUCTION

1. While many people are attracted to the good news of the grace of God offered through His Son Jesus Christ, certain questions often linger in their minds...
 - a. Why are there so many different denominations?
 - b. Can't the followers of Jesus Christ learn to get along?
 - c. What can be done about the religious division that exists today?
 - d. Is it possible for me to be simply a Christian, following Jesus without being a member of any denomination?

2. In reply to these questions, some make an effort to discount the significance of religious division, suggesting...
 - a. That the differences are not all that great
 - b. Or that religious division is good, for it enables people to find a church that suits them personally
 - But there are several reasons why I believe these answers are wrong and do a disservice to the cause of Christ

3. In this series of lessons, I have several objectives in mind...
 - a. To explain why denominationalism is wrong
 - b. To illustrate how one can simply be a Christian, serving Jesus without being a member of any denomination
 - c. To suggest how followers of Christ might be able "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" .cf. Ep 4:3

4. In this lesson, I wish to explain...
 - a. Why denominationalism is wrong

- b. Why anyone who truly follows Christ will do all they can to avoid participating in it

[First, perhaps a definition of terms is in order. .1

I. DEFINING "DENOMINATION" AND "DENOMINATIONALISM"

A. WHAT IS A "DENOMINATION"?

1. According to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language:

"A large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy."

2. From Webster's:

"A religious organization uniting in a single legal and administrative body a number of local congregations."

3. In simple laymen terms, a denomination is a group of congregations that are joined together under some governing body.
 - a. The number of congregations can be as few as two or more
 - b. But by their tie to a governing body above the local congregation, by definition they are "denominated" from all congregations that do not submit to the same authority
4. Some examples:
 - a. The Roman Catholic Church is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the pope in Rome
 - b. The Eastern Orthodox Church is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the patriarch of Constantinople
 - c. The Anglican Church of England is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the archbishop of Canterbury
 - d. The Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) is made up of those churches that submit to the synod in Missouri
 - e. The International Church of Christ is made up of those churches that submit to the Boston Church of Christ— These are just a few of the thousands of different denominations that now exist!

B. WHAT IS "DENOMINATIONALISM"?

1. According to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, it is:
 - a. **"The tendency to separate into religious denominations"**
 - b. **"Advocacy of separation into religious denominations"**
 - c. **"Strict adherence to a denomination; sectarianism"**
2. Again, Webster's dictionary defines it as:
 - a. **"Devotion to denominational principles or interests"**
 - b. **"Narrow emphasizing of denominational differences: SECTARIANISM"**
3. **For the purpose in this series, I will be applying the term to any approval of the denominational division which exists today**

- a. I concede that many people in denominations today are not all that devoted to their denominational principles or interests
- b. But by membership in a denomination they are by implication advocating separation into religious denominations

[But is denominationalism really all that bad? Am I suggesting that one cannot serve Christ faithfully while participating in religious division? The answer to both questions is "Yes!"

To understand the reason for saying this, let's examine...)

II. WHY DENOMINATIONALISM IS WRONG

A. **FIRST, DENOMINATIONALISM IS UN-SCRIPTURAL...**

- 1. That is, it is without Scriptural support
 - a. There is no basis in the Bible for local churches being divided up into various denominational bodies
 - b. There is no denomination that can go to the Bible and say, "See that passage? There is our church (denomination)!"
- 2. In the New Testament...
 - a. Local congregations were independent, self-governing
 - b. Church organization was limited to within the local congregation, with elders (also known as pastors, bishops, overseers, presbyters) appointed to oversee only the congregation of which they were members .cf. Ac 20:17,28; 1 Pe 5:1-2
- 3. The only authority above the local church in the New Testament was Christ and His apostles...
 - a. Once the church began, apostles were not replaced after they died
 - b. But through the Word of God, the authority of Christ and His apostles continues
- 4. Individuals, synods, conferences, etc., that presume to usurp authority over local congregations today do so without Scriptural authority

B. **SECOND, DENOMINATIONALISM IS ANTI-SCRIPTURAL...**

- 1. I.e., not only is it without scriptural support, it is contrary to what the Bible teaches
- 2. It is contrary to the prayer of Jesus for unity among His believers .Jn 17:20-23
- 3. It is condemned by Paul in his epistle to the church at Corinth
 - a. There are to be no divisions among believers -1 Co 1:10-13
 - b. Sectarianism is a sign of carnality .1 Co 3:3-4
- 4. It opposes the efforts of Christ on the cross! .Ep 2:14-16
 - a. Jesus died to break down the wall of division
 - b. Jesus died to reconcile man to God in ONE body
 - Just as sinning works against the efforts of Christ on the cross (for He also died to put away sin), so it is with denominational division!

C. **THIRD, DENOMINATIONALISM IS HARMFUL TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST...**

- 1. Jesus knew that unity among His disciples would be "the final apologetic"
 - a. Cf. "that the world may believe" -Jn 17:21

- b. In view of Jesus' words, we should not be surprised when unbelievers are slow to accept the gospel coming from a divided church
- 2. Many people point to the divided condition of those professing to follow Christ...
 - a. Atheists and agnostics often use religious division as an excuse not to believe in God
 - b. Adherents to non-Christian religions (such as Islam, Judaism, etc.) will often use denominationalism as a reason not to believe in Christ
- 3. Denominationalism has also given support and encouragement to the cults
 - a. Mormonism started in reaction to the denominationalism of Joseph Smith's day
 - b. Those who call themselves "Jehovah's Witnesses" use religious division to encourage people to follow their strictly-controlled organization

D. UNDERSTANDING THAT DENOMINATIONALISM IS WRONG HAS LED TO THESE INTERESTING STATEMENTS...

- 1. From **Martin Luther**, the leader of the Reformation Movement:

"I ask that men make no reference to my name, and call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? My doctrine, I am sure, is not mine, nor have I been crucified for any one. St. Paul, in 1 Cor. 3, would not allow Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I, poor, foul carcass that I am, come to have men give to the children of Christ a name derived from my worthless name? No, no, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names, and call ourselves Christians after Him Whose doctrine we have." -Hugh Thomason Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943, p. 135)

- 2. From **John Wesley**, another great reformation leader, among whose followers are Methodists, Wesleyans, etc.:

"Would to God that all party names, and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world, were forgot and that the very name [Methodist] might never be mentioned more, but be buried in eternal oblivion." John Wesley, Universal Knowledge, A Dictionary and Encyclopedia of Arts, Science, History, Biography, Law, Literature, Religions, Nations, Races, Customs, and Institutions, Vol. 9, Edward A. Pace, Editor (New York: Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1927, p. 540)

- 3. From **Charles Spurgeon**, one of the greatest Baptist preachers who ever lived:

"I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living! I hope that the Baptist name will soon perish, but let Christ's name last forever." Spurgeon Memorial Library, Vol. I., p. 168

CONCLUSION

1. Well, that day has not yet come, and denominationalism with its religious division seems to be as strong as ever!
2. But all is not lost...
 - a. For throughout the world, more and more people are throwing aside their denominational shackles
 - b. They are following Jesus Christ in the freedom of gospel liberty that comes from being simply a Christian!
 - c. And what may be a surprise to some, they are able to do so "being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" .cf. **Ph 2:2**
3. How is this possible?
 - a. That is what I hope to demonstrate starting with the next lesson
 - b. But it begins with two things:
 - 1) A strong desire to follow Jesus Christ and His prayer for unity .cf. **Jn 17:20-23**
 - 2) An understanding of the carnal nature of division, and why denominationalism is wrong .cf. **1 Co 3:3-4**

Dear friend, don't you want to be simply a Christian, a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ...?