

## THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT A DENOMINATION

(John 17:20-21)

### 1) How denominationalism derived.

- a) The Lord's church did not remain pure very long.
  - i) We soon read of problems in the church Jesus built.
  - ii) By the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, there were many departures from the truth of scripture taking place in the church.
  - iii) Departures in organization, worship, and authority were common place.
  - iv) By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, wholesale departure from truth was taking place.
- b) Until the early 1500's this error only grew worse until full blown apostasy had taken place.
- c) However, in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were some that had had enough of the corruption that was found in Catholicism.
  - i) This is when Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenburg, Germany.
  - ii) Also, Ulrich Zwingli tried to reform the church in Switzerland.
  - iii) John Calvin came along a little after these men.
- d) The result of their efforts were the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches and Calvinism.
  - i) Presbyterianism came about when Reformed church members and Calvinists combined.
  - ii) Because these efforts did not go as far as some would have liked, another group came about that were called Anabaptists.
  - iii) Out of this group, smaller groups grew, such as the Mennonites, Baptists, Quakers, and a group simply known as Brethren.
- e) It was during this time that Henry VIII broke England from the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church was started.
- f) What all of this did was drastically change the religious landscape of Europe.
- g) The Catholic Church was still strong and some of the Reformation groups had gotten political power and both of these groups made life hard for some of the offshoot religious groups that had sprung up.
- h) Some of those groups sought a safe place to practice their religion, which brought them to the new country of America.
- i) Once making it to America, some of the groups continued to divide internally over such things as national origin, language, culture, as well as doctrinal disputes.
- j) That process of division has continued and now we have gotten to the number 35,000+ denominations that we mentioned in the introduction.

### 2) Denominationalism described.

- a) William Woodson, in an old Spiritual Sword, from 1975, gave this definition: "a religious group larger than the local church, held together by essential doctrinal and organic ties adopted by its policy making groups, but smaller than the whole family of God."

- b) Br. Woodson said that it is a group that is larger than a local congregation but smaller than the universal church, both of which are the only ways the church is described in scripture.
- c) Basically, as the word sounds, every denomination is supposed to be a part of the whole.
  - i) The word “denominate” means “to give a name to; to designate.”
  - ii) The word “denomination” means “a large group of religious congregations united under a single administrative and legal hierarchy; a name or designation, especially for a class or group.”
- d) What is interesting is that usually no denomination claims to be the whole body of the saved.
  - i) This is illustrated in various sayings.
  - ii) We are all sailors on the same ship, but we wear different uniforms.
  - iii) Things like that, which are used to make denominationalism sound rational.
- e) Though wearing different names, worshiping in different ways, and organized in different ways, a commonly held view among denominations of all stripes is that it is not essential to salvation for one to be a member of a denomination at so long as a person in his or her own way respects, serves or worships God.
  - i) This is the idea that one church is as good as another.
  - ii) This view is based on the belief that God approves of and accepts all denominations.

### 3) Denominationalism defended.

- a) Some defend denominationalism by saying John 15 and the use of the vine and branches is a description of it.
  - i) There are those that use this passage to teach that the New Testament authorized different, divisive religious organizations.
  - ii) Notice that Jesus was speaking to His disciples (John 15:3).
  - iii) Jesus then says the word “man” when speaking about the branches (John 15:5-6).
  - iv) If this teaches denominationalism, you have one vine bearing different kinds of fruits and such cannot be the case.
- b) Some defend denominationalism by saying that each one is just a different route to heaven.
  - i) Jesus is the way to God and there is no other way (John 14:6).
  - ii) Any other way than Jesus is a way to death (Proverbs 14:12).
  - iii) If you and I could devise different ways to get to heaven, then Jesus died for nothing (Galatians 2:21).
- c) Some say that all denominations teach some truth.
  - i) I would never argue with this statement.
    - (1) However, Satan says some truth.
    - (2) Atheists teach some truth.
  - ii) Some truth is not enough to save anyone.
  - iii) Paul told the Ephesian elders that he preached to them the whole counsel of God.

- iv) Any other gospel message leads to destruction (Galatians 1:6-9).
- v) Which part is okay to add to or subtract from is some truth will get you to heaven?
- d) Some defend denominationalism on the basis of the statement that there are good people in every denomination.
  - i) There are good people who are Muslims, does that make Islam ok?
  - ii) There are good people who are atheists, does that make atheism ok?
  - iii) There are good people who are Hindus, Buddhists, or nothing religiously at all, does that make those things ok?
  - iv) Human goodness and sincerity is not enough to save a person and Paul is a prime example of that.
- e) Some defend denominationalism by saying that one is as good as another.
  - i) This is true when applied to denominations because one church started by man is as good as any other church started by man.
  - ii) No church is as good as the one started by our Lord and purchased with His blood.
    - (1) The blood of Jesus is in no other body but His.
    - (2) Reconciliation to God is only in Christ's church (Ephesians 2:16).
    - (3) Christ is the Savior of no other church but His (Ephesians 5:23).

#### **4) Denominationalism denounced.**

- a) It is denounced by God's word.
  - i) All believers are to be one like the Father and the Son (John 17:20-21).
  - ii) Religious division is condemned (1 Corinthians 1:10-12).
  - iii) Everyone is to pursue the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).
  - iv) Denominationalism exalts man and man's will above God and His will (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).
- b) It is denounced by its fruits (Matthew 7:20).
  - i) Denominationalism causes confusion because many don't know where to go because of the chaos and confusion caused by it.
  - ii) It caused destruction of the unity for which Jesus prayed.
  - iii) It causes people to be lost (Acts 4:12).
- c) It is denounced by those who have been a part of it.
  - i) Martin Luther: "I pray you to leave my name alone, and call not yourselves "Lutherans," but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified for anyone. St. Paul would not permit that any should call themselves of Paul, nor of Peter, but of Christ. How, then, does it befit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes, to give my name to the children of Christ? Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with them all; let us call ourselves only Christians after him from whom our doctrines come (Life of Luther, p. 289).
  - ii) Charles Spurgeon, noted Baptist preacher: I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living. I hope they will soon be gone. I hope the Baptist name will soon perish, but let Christ's name last forever (Spurgeon Memorial Library, Vol 1, p. 168).

- iii)** John Wesley, founder of Methodism: Would to God that all party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world were forgot; that we might all agree to sit down together as humble, loving disciples at the feet of the common Master, to hear his word, to imbibe his Spirit, and to transcribe his life into our own (Hardeman's Tabernacle Sermons, Vol 5, p. 60).
- d)** Other like statements from other denominational writers could be given but these suffice to show that even some of those credited with founding religious organizations believed the denominational model to be unscriptural.

Some of this material came from an outline by Gary Workman.