

## **THE CHURCH IS UNDENOMINATIONAL**

### **Int.**

1. Aim: To show that the N.T. church is not a denomination !!
2. Rom. 16:16 "Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you."
3. In the days of the apostles each congregation of Christians was to be so patterned after the will of Christ that it would be a church "OF CHRIST" and not a human organization.
  - a. The congregations belonged to Christ because they were authorized by him and constructed according to His Divine Will.
  - b. They would not have been "Churches of Christ" if they had been the inventions of human wisdom, and built according to some pattern gotten up by man, or set of men.
4. Christianity in the New Testament was undenominational.
  - a. That is difficult for many people to see today.
  - b. But it just means that we can be Christians, members of the Lord's church, and not be members of any denomination.

### **Discussion**

#### **I. THE EARLY CHRISTIANS WERE UNDENOMINATIONAL**

- A. It seems that almost everyone can see that the Christianity revealed in the Bible is undenominational.
- B. WERE THE APOSTLES MEMBERS OF A DENOMINATION ? No!
  1. The apostles were members of the church which Jesus built.
  2. Did they then join the denomination of their choice"? No!
  3. If so, what denomination did Peter choose? Did John choose another, and if so, which?

4. Can you give the name of any denomination now in existence that was in existence at that time?
- C. And yet it is difficult for many to see how such could be possible and practical today.
1. If those men could be Christians, members of the church, and not belong to any denomination, then why can't we today?
  2. Paul taught us to follow him to the extent that he followed Christ. 1 Cor. 11:1 "Be ye followers of me, even as I also [am] of Christ."
  3. We can be a Christian and not a member of a denomination?

## **II. WHAT IS A DENOMINATION ?**

- A. Illustration of the word
1. Our currency is divided into various denominations: five dollar, ten dollar, twenty dollar bills
  2. Our political system is also denominated: i.e. the Republican party and the Democratic party
  3. The word "denomination" signifies a division or a segment.
- B. WHAT IS A RELIGIOUS "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."

C. Word Denomination is not found in the N.T.

1. But the word "sect" is used in reference to different religious parties.
2. The Jews were supposed to be one people under one God with one law.
  - a. But they were divided into various sects.
  - b. The best known of these groups had certain characteristics and they were known as Pharisees and Sadducees.
  - c. These Jewish groups were not authorized by God and were properly called "sects"
  - d. Acts 5:17 "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,"
  - e. Acts 15:5 "But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command [them] to keep the law of Moses."
  - f. Sect = A party or disunion, heresy – a division and the formation of a party — "a sect" is a division developed and brought to an issue
3. Christ's church was an entirely distinctive group
  - a. The uninformed assumed the church to be just another Jewish sect
  - b. The Jews in Rome described the church as being a "sect" "...that every where is spoken against." Acts 28:22
  - c. But the truth was that the church an entirely distinctive group, it was not a Jewish sect.

D. The Church today is not a sect or a denomination.

### **III. THE CHURCH WAS UNDENOMINATIONAL**

- A. We do not read of any person in New Testament times joining a denomination.
  - 1. Denominationalism is something unknown to New Testament writers.
  - 2. If we practice Christianity today as it was practiced then, we must be Christians, members of the N.T. church, and not join any denomination.
  
- B. This means Christianity is undenominational.
  - 1. Some think they have the idea of undenominational Christianity, when really what they have in mind is inter-denominational Christendom.
  - 2. They have the idea that the church is an institution made up of all the denominations. [Conglomerationalism - not a word but describes some people's view of the church - cafeteria style - pick and choose what you like]
  - 3. But the church must be separate and apart from denominationalism.
  - 4. It is not inter-denominational but it is undenominational. And that means that members of the church should stay out of all denominations.
  - 5. This is the plea being made by churches of Christ everywhere today.
  
- C. Did the Apostles tell others to join the church of their choice? No!!!
  - 1. All the apostles were members of the same church, the church which Jesus built.
  - 2. The people they taught and converted were all members of the same church.
  - 3. Pentecost:
    - a. In Acts 2 we read about Peter preaching a great sermon.
    - b. The people believed and asked what to do to be saved.
    - c. Peter told these believers to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins. Acts 2:38

- d. When they did this the Lord added 3,000 to the church - Acts 2:41,47
  - e. To what church did the Lord add them? It was the church which he built !
4. All believers who repented and were baptized for the remission of their sins were added to the same church; they all were members of the same church.
- a. Now, did the apostles encourage them to divide into small units, denominations, so each could have the "church of his choice"? NO !!!
  - b. There were three thousand converts on the very first day, so they had plenty of material to organize ten denominations.
    - (1) Then, shortly after, perhaps the next day, "the number of men came to be about five thousand." ( Acts 4:4 ).
    - (2) Later, "believers were the more added to the Lord," ( Acts 5:14 ) and, "The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of priests were obedient to the faith" ( Acts 6:7 ).
    - (3) Surely there was plenty material for several large denominations, but there is not one word that even hints to the idea that they divided into different denominations, teaching contradictory doctrines. "They continued in the apostles' doctrine." ( Acts 2:42 ).
    - (4) The apostles did not teach contradictory doctrines; these converts did not teach contradictory doctrines.
    - (5) Denominations today teach contradictory doctrines, therefore they do not all follow the apostles' doctrine.
    - (6) If they did, their doctrines would not be contradictory; they would agree with each other as the apostles agreed with each other.

c. But we have positive evidence that these converts of the apostles did not divide into denominations, believing and teaching contradictory doctrines.

(1) "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul." ( Acts 4:32 ).

(2) This is an expression which indicates unity of belief and purpose.

(3) Paul urged his converts at Philippi to "stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel." ( Philippians 1 :27).

D. The apostles discouraged dividing into denominational groups

1. At Corinth Paul had established the church by preaching the gospel so that "many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized." ( Acts 18:8 ).

a. When they did that they were added to the church just like those people we learned about in Acts 2:38-47; and they were added to the same church, the body of Christ, the only difference being their geographical location.

b. When the church was well planted, Paul left them for other mission fields.

2. Not long after Paul left, they devised what was rapidly becoming a modern denominational situation.

a. They had four groups, one named for Paul, one for Apollos, one for Cephas ( Peter ) and one for Christ. ( 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 ).

b. Instead of Paul thanking God for this number of denominations so each could join the church of his choice, he condemned them as being carnal.

c. "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men? For when one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men?" ( 1 Corinthians 3:3-4 ).

- d. In 1 Cor. 1:10 he told them: "I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment."
3. Paul's attitude was in harmony with that of the Lord when he prayed, "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee. that they may be one, even as we are one. . . that the world may know that thou didst send me." ( John 17:20-23 )
- E. Since the apostles did not join any denomination, but were just members of the church which Jesus built; and, since they did not encourage their converts to divide into denominations so they could have the church of their choice; and, since Paul condemned that very thing when it was starting in Corinth; and, since Jesus prayed that it might never be in this world, but that those who believe in him through the words of the apostles might be one as he and the Father are one; since these things are true, what should you and I do about the matter?
1. We will do what the apostles taught people to do to be saved and let the Lord add us to the same church to which he added those people in the long ago.
  2. We will not join anything the apostles did not join.
  3. After becoming members of the one body, which is the church the Lord built, we will associate ourselves with others who have done the same and we will worship and carry on the work of the Lord.
  4. A group like this, guided solely by the Word of God, will be a body of Christ, a church of Christ.

5. It cannot be a denomination any more than the church in Jerusalem was not a denomination.
6. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Acts. 11:26

#### **IV. I AM A CHRISTIAN**

- A. Sometimes a person asks me, "What are you religiously?"
  1. I reply, "I am a Christian."
  2. When I answer in this way, he seems to think that I am trying to joke about the matter, that I am trying to evade the question.
  3. And this same person replies by saying, "I know, but what kind of Christian are you?"
  4. "Well," I reply, "not any certain kind. Just a Christian in the same sense that people were Christian in apostolic times."
  5. "Yes," he says, "But I mean what denomination do you belong to?"
  6. "I don't belong to any denomination," I reply.
  7. Then he looks at me as if he thought I knew absolutely nothing about Christianity.
- B. No Denomination
  1. "You mean you're not a member of any denomination? Why, surely you must be."
  2. "No," I answer, "I have never joined a denomination in my life. I claim to be saved, and the Bible says that the Lord adds those who are saved to the church (Acts 2:47)
  3. "I did what we are told we must do to be saved, and therefore the Lord added me to the church. I have never joined a church."

4. "I have never become a member of a denomination. I simply obeyed the gospel and the Lord added me to His church."

## Conclusion

1. When you read the accounts of conversion in the book of Acts you see that these people heard the gospel, obeyed it and were added to the Church.
2. They did not join a denomination.
3. Denominationalism is something unknown to the N.T. writers.
4. If we practice Christianity today as it was practiced then, we must be Christians, members of the N.T. church, and not join any denomination. 1 Pet. 4:11
5. Let us simply be Christians following and practicing the things taught in the N.T.
6. 1 Pet. 4:11
7. Are you a Christian? If not we plead with you to obey the gospel,
8. HBRCB = S Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, Baptized = Salvation
9. Then the Lord will add you to his church.
10. Rom. 16:16 "Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you."

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## Bibliography

1. See files on Denominationalism
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