

Jesus' Church and Denominationalism...

(by Bob Pulliam)

When the church of Jesus Christ is placed beside modern denominationalism there is a stark contrast. This contrast can be seen in outward practices... What really sets Jesus' church apart is an attitude of unity which prevails within it, and is exercised in viewing God's word.

In this study we wish to...

- Determine what denominationalism really is.
- Compare it with the Church that Jesus built.
- See the distinct nature found in Jesus' church.

What Is Denominationalism?...

Some incorrectly identify denominationalism:

Some identify it solely by it's practices: secular pursuits; innovations in worship; etc...
Some identify it solely by the presence of a headquarters on earth tying congregations together.

These identifying marks are symptoms of what denominationalism is really about. The word "denomination" refers to the act of naming or calling by name with a view to distinguishing from an original and/or between various differing kinds. There are three distinct features of denominationalism:

- Departing from an Original.
- Division.
- Naming that Division.

Denominationalism approves of outright division in religion, and fully sanctions modern innovation in it's structure and practice.... Division is the basis, practice is only the symptom.

Why Isn't the Church of Christ a Denomination?...

"Surely you folks don't think you've escaped the denominating... After all, you have a name." Haven't heard that one? It sounds valid, but it's not. The church of Christ is not a denomination because it has not divided itself from the original pattern; nor does it try to distinguish itself among other churches as one choice among many in "acceptable divisions".

In order for differences among churches to exist, there must have been a departure from what originally existed. No denominations existed in the first century; denominations do exist now; so there must be a departure somewhere! How many different denominations can you find in Acts?... In the epistles?... In Revelation?... The closest you come is in the efforts of some of the Corinthians (I Cor 1:12), and such is condemned (vv 10ff).

Division and deviation from the original pattern was strictly forbidden. Note the following:

Gal 1:6-9 Any who would preach another gospel was to be accursed.
I Cor 1:10 Brethren are to be joined in the same mind and in the same judgment.
Jd 3 We must contend earnestly for "the faith" which was once for all delivered.
Phil 2:1f We must be likeminded; of one accord, and of one mind.
Eph 4:1-5 Unity is of paramount importance.
I Cor 3:11 No other foundation can be laid than Christ. One foundation - One building!

It is true that there are some segments of the "Church of Christ" which have moved into denominationalism. It is inevitable that such should occur. But such is true because of their departure from truth in certain matters. If apostasy came to the church in the beginning, why shouldn't it be a problem to this day?

Have we denominated ourselves with the name "church of Christ"? Tell me how that name sets us apart from the pattern revealed in the New Testament. Did Paul call the churches, "churches of Christ" in Romans 16:16? In addition, the phrase "church of Christ" is a descriptive term. It is the church that belongs to Christ.

The church of Christ remains undenominational when it:

- Holds to the pattern of New Testament doctrine and practice...
- Wears only a name given within that pattern...
- Refuses to compromise with any who would divide and denominate (name).

The Distinct Singularity of Jesus' Church...

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus promised to build only one church. How many did He build? How would He expect us to recognize it? The apostle Paul affirmed that there was only one church.

- Eph 4:4 There is only one body.
- Eph 1:22f The body = the church.
- Therefore there is only one church.

In Acts 20:28 we find that Jesus purchased only one church with His blood. In John 20:20ff Jesus prayed for the unity of his followers, which if heeded would only result in one church. Who would be in charge of it? Jesus, through His word! (see [Singularity of the Church](#))

Salvation and Membership in the Church...

Must a person be a member of Jesus' church to be saved?. In Acts 20:28 we find that we are saved by Jesus blood (Rom 5:9), and it is the church that he purchased with that blood. In Ephesians 5:23-27 we learn that Jesus is the Savior of the church, and has cleansed it with the washing of water (baptism) and the word, that it should be holy and without blemish. If the church has nothing to do with salvation, then why was it ever conceived and built?. In the New Testament, the saved highly esteem the church, and strive to work together within the bounds of God's authority.

Conclusion...

The church of Jesus Christ revealed in the New Testament was not a denomination. It was the only church in existence, being the only one built by Jesus Christ. As long as any people,

laboring together as a church, adhere to the original pattern revealed in God's word, they are the church of Jesus Christ. When deviation from that pattern occurs, division cannot help but result. The people of God cannot, and must not, fellowship error (III Jn 9ff).