

Christ's Church Is Not A Denomination

by Wendell Winkler

Our currency system is divided into various denominations: five dollar, ten dollar, etc. Our political system is also denominated: i.e., the Republican party, the Democratic party. We can see from these illustrations that the word "denomination" signifies a division or a segment; thus, in the religious sense, a sect or a party. A denomination is larger than any local church, but smaller than the redeemed as a whole. Yet, the New Testament speaks only of local congregations (1 Corinthians 1:2) or the church embracing all of the saved (Ephesians 1:22, 23). Hence the New Testament church cannot be fitted into any denominational mold.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH OF THE FIRST CENTURY

(1) An observation. Let us kindly observe that the church of Christ (a) is not a Jewish synagogue. The Old Testament, the foundation of Judaism, has been done away (Rom. 7:1-4; Colossians 2:14,17; Hebrews 8:8-13). Furthermore, (b) the church of Christ is not a Protestant denomination. All the denominations of our day were established by men, hundreds of years after the church of our Lord was established on Pentecost, Acts 2, A.D. 33 (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4, 47). Denominational earmarks are conspicuously absent in the church of Christ: prayer altars, voting on baptismal candidates, mechanical instruments of music in worship, universal and territorial organizations, etc. (c) The church of Christ is not the Catholic Church.. The Roman Catholic church did not come into existence in a fullgrown state until 606 A.D., nearly 600 years after the Lord's church was established in 33 A.D. as previously observed. The cardinal doctrines of Catholicism are not in harmony with biblical teaching, as can be scripturally observed in many of the chapters composing this volume.

(2) The church defined . The word "church" is from the Greek word ecclesia, and means "the called out." Thus, the church is that body of people who have been called out of the world by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), by obedience thereto (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Christ rules as the singular head of the church (Colossians 1:18), and the Spirit dwells within her (Ephesians 2:22, 23).

(3) The church is singular in number. There is one fold (John 10:16). The church is that fold (Acts 20:28). There is one body (Ephesians 4:4); that body is the church (Ephesians 1:22, 23). The Lord taught the monogamy of marriage (Romans 7:1-4) and the church is his bride (Ephesians 5:22-33).

The church of Christ is that one, true New Testament church which existed in the first century. Such can be seen by the fact that it possesses the same identifying features.

THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

(a) Designations: church of Christ (Romans 16:16), church of God (1 Cor. 1:2),

church of the Lord (Acts 20: 28 ASV).

(b) Organization: elders, deacons, evangelists and members in the local congregation (Philippians 1:1).

(c) Worship: met on first day of each week (1 Cor. 16: 2), and engaged in acappella singing, praying, teaching, the Lord's supper and giving (Acts 2:42, 47; 1 Cor. 14:15; 16:2, Acts 20:7).

(d) Guide: the apostles' doctrine was their sole rule of faith and practice (Acts 2:42; Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:19).

(e) Terms of entrance: believed, repented, confessed Christ and were baptized (Acts 8: 26:40).

(f) Mission: to support the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE 20TH CENTURY

(a) The church of Christ is designated as just that, the church of Christ, etc.

(b) The church of Christ is organized with elders, deacons, evangelists, members.

(c) The church of Christ meets upon the first day of each week and engages in acappella singing, praying, teaching, the Lord's supper, and giving.

(d) The church of Christ is guided solely by the apostles' doctrine, the New Testament.

(e) The church of Christ is entered by people believing, repenting, confessing and being baptized.

(f) The church of Christ engages in the support of the truth.

NOTE: A thing is composed of the sum of its parts. Accordingly, it can be seen that the church of Christ is not one among the many; but, rather, it is the one, true New Testament church.

OUR LORD WAS UNDENOMINATIONAL SO MUST HIS CHURCH BE

(1) Our Lord did not align himself with any party or division during his earthly pilgrimage. While our Lord lived upon the earth, there were four principle divisions among the Jews: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, and the Essenes. Though each of these advocated some truth, our Lord identified himself with none of them. This is most significant.

(2) Additionally, let us note: (a) Our Lord prayed for unity, the antithesis of

denominationalism (John 17:20, 21); (b) our Lord paid for unity, the antithesis of denominationalism (1 Cor. 1:10); and (d) our Lord planned for unity, the antithesis of denominationalism (Eph. 4:1-6). Therefore, our Lord was undenominational and anti-denominational. Thus, must his church be.

A TWO-FOLD CONTRAST: THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

- (1) Divine in origin. (Matt. 16:18; Daniel 2:44).
- (2) Will last forever. (Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:28, 29).
- (3) Designated by Bible names. (Rom. 16:16; Acts 20: 28, 1 Cor. 1:2).
- (4) First century in origin. (Acts 2:47).
- (5) Heavenly headquarters. (Eph.1:22, 23; 1 Peter 3:22).
- (6) Bible only (Acts 2:42; 1 Pet. 4:11; Gal.1:6-9; Rev. 22:18, 19; Jude 3).
- (7) Added to (Acts 2:47)
- (8) Essential to salvation (Eph. 5:23; Acts 20:28).
- (9) Calvary-purchased (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25).
- (10) The apostles were members of this church (Acts 2:41).
- (11) The church of Christ's choice (Matt. 16:18,19; Col. 1:24).
- (12) Entered by believing, repenting confessing and being baptized (Acts 2:36-47; 8:26-40).
- (13) Jerusalem the birthplace (Zechariah 1:16; Isaiah 2:1-4; Mark 9:1; Luke 24:46; Acts 1:1-4).

DENOMINATIONALISM

- (1) Manmade, without divine origin. The Lord is not the author of confusion nor denominationalism (1 Cor. 14: 33). Our Lord did not work against his own prayer for unity by establishing conflicting and contradictory denominations (John 17: 20,21).
- (2) Will be rooted up. (Matt. 15: 13).
- (3) Named after men, forms of church government, virtues, days "ordinances," etc. Yet, we are to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11).
- (4) Catholicism had its beginning in the 7th century and Protestantism had its

beginning in the 16th century.

(5) Earthly headquarters. Some in Rome, or Salt Lake City, or Independence, Missouri, or Cleveland, Tennessee, etc.

(6) Creeds, manuals, disciplines, confessions of faith catechisms. Such reflects upon the all-sufficiency of the word of God (2 Tim. 3: 16,17).

(7) Join. You do not join the family of God; rather, you are added thereto (1 Tim. 3:15).

(8) Can be saved and never be a member of a given denomination. Thus, denominationalism stands self condemned as being unnecessary and (un)related to salvation.

(9) No such price paid.

(10) There was no apostolic membership in human denominations. After all, they were not even in existence!

(11) The church of man's choice. Now, read Psalm 127:1.

(12) Human laws of induction. One man, being told he must have an experience of grace before he could be considered as a candidate for membership in a given denomination, fabricated a story. Whereupon this denomination voted and accepted him. Later, his conscience bothered him because of the lie. Accordingly, he returned, stating the same, resulting in his expulsion from this denomination. He succinctly observed, "They voted me in for telling a lie, and they voted me out for telling the truth!"

(13) Varied places of beginning, with Jerusalem not being the place of beginning for a single one.

VARIOUS REASONS WHY THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT A DENOMINATION

1. Denominationalism is contrary to the Lord's prayer (John 17:20, 21).
2. Denominationalism is a fruitful cause of infidelity (John 17:20, 21).
3. Denominationalism is wrong because Christ is not divided (1 Cor. 1:11-13).
4. Denominationalism is wrong because the body of Christ is one, not many (1 Cor. 12:13, 20; Eph 4:4; Col 3:15).
5. Denominationalism is contrary to one of the basic purposes of Calvary's cross (Eph. 2:15, 16).

6. Denominationalism is a vain attempt to serve God (Matt. 15:9; Psalm 127:1).
7. Denominationalism divides homes, when God wants homes united (Joshua 24:15; Amos 3:3; Mark 3:25).
8. Denominationalism is contrary to Paul's plea for unity, for undenominational Christianity (1 Cor. 1:10).
9. Denominationalism is contrary to the apostles' doctrine (Rom. 16:17, 18).
10. Denominationalism is a sin that God hates (Proverbs 6:6-19).
11. Denominationalism implies that God is the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).
12. Denominationalism is not apostolic.
13. Denominationalism is destined for destruction (Mark 3:24, 25).

THE CURE FOR DENOMINATIONALISM

We must have an unreserved commitment to the Bible as the sole, objective standard in religion. If three people differ as to the time of day, they can settle their differences by consulting the objective time standard, the naval observatory time. Such settles the matter, and produces unity. If a man goes to three different post offices, he will be given the same postage for mailing of his package. Why? Because each postal clerk consults the same guide book. Unity exists because of allegiance to a single objective authority. In like manner, when all men will lay down their creeds, disciplines, manuals, confessions of faith, catechisms, think-so's, maybe's, and subjective feelings and each with an unprejudiced and receptive heart turns to the word of God, then, and only then, will unity result. Such will constitute the death knell to denominationalism. We must be committed to being nothing, calling ourselves nothing, obeying nothing, and saying nothing except that which is authorized by the word of God. Only then will we have "the unity of the spirit" of Ephesians 4:1-6: one body - unity of organization; one Spirit - unity of guidance; one hope - unity of aspiration; one faith - unity of message; one Lord - unity of authority; one baptism - unity of practice; and, one God - unity of worship.

To look at it another way, one of God's immutable laws is that seed bears after its kind (Genesis 1:12). Accordingly, if we preach only the gospel, it will produce in our day the one, true New Testament church that it produced in the days of the apostles, when no denominations existed. To believe otherwise, is to repudiate one of God's immutable laws!

The church of Christ is not a denomination. If she were, she would surrender her right to exist (Matt. 15:13). Our Lord was undenominational and antidenominational. His church cannot afford to be otherwise. Her plea is for

pure, New Testament, undenominational Christianity. And, how encouraging it is that many are being attracted thereto.