

Denominationalism

Introduction:

- A. The Bible says that there is only one religious body and one faith that is acceptable to God (Eph. 4:4-6)
 - 1. Yet, among those who claim to be Christians today there are thousands of different faiths and thousands of different kinds of churches.
 - 2. These various religious bodies with their differing beliefs and practices are called, “Denominations.”
- B. What is “denominationalism?”
 - 1. A denomination is defined as “a class, or society of individuals called by the same name; a sect” (*Webster’s Dictionary*).
 - 2. In a religious sense it is a religious group that is represented by a collection of local churches.
 - 3. It is essentially the dividing up of believers in Christ into different religious parties.
 - a. Each group of churches has its own name.
 - b. Each follows its own creed or manual.
 - c. Each has its own organizational structure.
 - d. Each has its own terms of membership.
 - e. And, each group considers itself to be right.
 - 4. Some denominations are very tolerant of other denominations.
 - a. They view all the various denominational groups as part of the one body of Christ.
 - b. They say that all the various denominations can have unity with one another and tolerate one another even though they all teach and practice different things.
 - c. This is the “ecumenical” idea--you can just join the church of your choice because one is as good as another.
 - 5. Some denominations are not tolerant of others.
 - a. They view their own group as the only true church.
 - b. They view other denominations as false churches.
 - c. They also deny that anyone can be saved outside of their own organization.
 - d. This is the traditional view of the Roman Catholic Church, the Jehovah’s Witness organization and others.
- C. There are some questions about denominationalism that need to be answered.
 - 1. If one denomination is right, then can all the others be right too, even though they don’t teach and practice the same things as far as what is necessary in order to be saved?
 - 2. Can all of them be wrong?
 - 3. How can we determine who is right or wrong?
 - 4. Why are there so many different kinds of churches and different faiths when the Bible says there should only be one (Eph. 4:4-6)?

Body:

I. Church History.

- A. The church began shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus.
 - 1. Before he died, Jesus said he would build his church (Matt. 16:18).
 - 2. After the resurrection of Christ, the apostles preached salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for the first time on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41-42, 47).
 - 3. The church began at that time in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Christ.
 - 4. As the gospel spread, local churches began in cities everywhere.
 - a. Acts 13:1.
 - b. Rom. 16:1.
 - c. Gal. 1:2.
- B. The New Testament warned of a coming apostasy.
 - 1. The apostles warned that there would be an apostasy, or falling away from the truth.
 - a. Acts 20:29-30.
 - b. 2 Tim. 4:2-4.
 - c. 1 Tim. 4:1-3.
 - 2. Some within the body of Christ would begin teaching and practicing false doctrines and lead others into error.
 - 3. They would “depart from the faith,” yet instead of giving up the idea of being Christians altogether, they would continue to assemble and worship in a corrupted manner.
 - 4. This apostasy came shortly after the time of the apostles.
- C. Roman Catholicism.
 - 1. Just as the apostles had warned, the apostasy began with corruption of the elders of local churches (Acts 20:29-30).
 - 2. Some churches elevated one elder over the others and referred to him as the “bishop” of the church.
 - 3. Before long, one bishop was placed over all the churches of a city or region.
 - 4. The Roman Emperor, Constantine, called these bishops together for the Nicean Council in 325 A.D.
 - 5. The purpose of the council was to come to agreement on certain doctrinal matters.
 - 6. The council agreed on a number of points that they established as the “Nicene Creed.”
 - 7. Some bishops began referring to themselves as “Pope” or “Father” (see Matthew 23:9).
 - 8. In 606 A.D. Boniface III of Rome was given the titles of “Universal Bishop” & “Head of the Church.”
 - 9. Many unscriptural doctrines and practices were added over the course of time.
 - a. Inherited Sin (400 A.D.)

- b. Infant Baptism (400 A.D.)
- c. Worship of Mary (431 A.D.)
- d. Instrumental Music in worship (666 A.D.)
- e. Adoration of Saints, Images, Relics (788 A.D.)
- f. Meat restrictions, Lent, Good Friday (998 A.D.)
- g. Holy Water (1009 A.D.)
- h. Rosary Beads (1090 A.D.)
- i. Celibacy for priests (1123 A.D.)
- j. Sale of Indulgences (1190 A.D.)
- k. Confession of sin to priests (1215 A.D.)
- l. Sprinkling (1311 A.D.)
- m. Purgatory (1438 A.D.)
- n. Church traditions made equal to Bible (1545 A.D.)
- o. Infallibility of the Pope (1870 A.D.)

10. The Catholic Church also became the political authority over much of the world.

- a. In 1076 A.D. Pope Gregory VII excommunicated the German king Henry IV.
- b. In order to retain his position as king, Henry had to submit to the Pope.
- c. Slide: Cairns quote on Henry IV waiting outside in the snow to be reinstated by the Pope.

11. The Catholic Church perverted the doctrine of Christ for monetary gain.

- a. In order to raise money, a monk named Johann Tetzel was commissioned to sell “indulgences” in the early 1500’s.
- b. Indulgences were documents that, if purchased, would free a person from the penalty of sin.
- c. He would tell people that if they purchased an indulgence their dead relatives would be allowed into heaven.
- d. Martin Luther, a Catholic priest, opposed this.

D. The Protestant Reformation.

- 1. Martin Luther tried to reform (correct) the abuses of the Catholic Church.
 - a. He rejected some Catholic doctrines and taught that man is saved by faith in Christ alone, and formed his own catechism, which contained all of the teachings that he felt were essential.
 - b. He was excommunicated from the Catholic Church in 1530.
 - c. After his death his followers created the Lutheran Church.
- 2. Others broke away from Rome at this time as well.
 - a. King Henry VIII of England wanted to divorce his wife and marry another woman, but the Pope would not grant the divorce, so Henry had parliament make him head of the Church of England in 1534.
 - b. The work of John Calvin and John Knox led to the formation of the Presbyterian Church in 1536.
 - c. Some in the Church of England felt the need for more independence, so they started the Congregational Church in 1608
 - d. John Smythe felt baptism (immersion) was neglected in the Church of England, so he formed the Baptist Church in 1611.

- e. John Wesley believed personal holiness was lacking in the Church of England, so he formed the Methodist Church in 1729.
- f. In New York, Joseph Smith rejected all denominations and created his own religion in 1830 called “Mormonism.”
- g. Also in America, some decided the Sabbath day was being neglected, so Ellen G. White formed the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in 1844.
- h. Charles T. Russell organized his own group in 1870 and by 1931 they became known as the “Jehovah’s Witnesses.”
- i. Around 1900 some believed there should still be miraculous gifts today, so many charismatic Pentecostal groups were formed.
- j. The list goes on and on.

II. What Is Wrong With Denominationalism?

- A. Denominationalism is condemned by God.
- B. Denominationalism is the dividing of believers into separate religious parties.
- 2. The Bible clearly condemns this kind of division.
 - a. 1 Cor. 1:11-13.
 - b. Eph. 4:1-3.
- B. Denominations use man-made names for the church.
 - 1. Did the names: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Mormon, etc. come from the Bible?
 - 2. The church belongs to Christ!
 - a. Jesus is the head of the church (Col. 1:18).
 - b. In the Bible, local churches were called after the name of Christ (Rom. 16:16).
 - c. Members of Christ’s church were also called after his name (Acts 11:26).
- C. Denominations use man-made creeds and church manuals.
 - 1. Creeds are official statements of what the group considers essential in order to belong to that particular denomination.
 - 2. All denominations claim that their creeds are simply based on Scripture.
 - 3. But if that is the case, then why do they all contradict one another and the Scriptures?
 - 4. Do we need creeds and church manuals?
 - a. If they contain less than what the Bible says, then they contain too little.
 - b. If they contain more than what the Bible says, then they contain too much.
 - c. If these creeds are exactly the same as what the Bible says, then we don’t need them because we already have the Bible.
 - d. Creeds simply serve the purpose of dividing people up into different groups.
 - e. We should follow the gospel, not man-made creeds!
 - 1) Jn. 8:31-32.
 - 2) Jn. 12:48.

- D. Denominations use man-made membership requirements.
 - 1. When one obeys the gospel he is saved and added to Christ's church, and he then has a responsibility to assemble with a local church.
 - a. Mk. 16:16.
 - b. Acts 2:47.
 - c. Acts 2:42.
 - 2. But denominations create their own plans for membership such as, infant baptism & later confirmation, voting, probation periods for new members, and man-made membership ceremonies.
 - a. Slide: Quote on voting from Baptist Handbook.
 - b. Slide: Quote on probation period from Methodist Discipline.
- E. Denominations use man-made organizational structures.
 - 1. The largest functioning body of Christians in the New Testament is the local church in a given area (Phil. 1:1).
 - 2. But denominations have created hierarchy structures that link all local churches together under a man-made head.
 - 3. Slide: Denominational hierarchy.
 - 4. While the Roman Catholic Church places the Pope at the top of the hierarchy, other denominations keep the same basic structure but substitute conferences, synods, committees, legislative councils, governing bodies, presiding bishops, general overseers, or head churches in place of Pope.
- F. Denominations employ man-made doctrines and practices.
 - 1. Can we find approval for the following denominational doctrines and practices in the Bible?
 - a. Church-sponsored social, recreational, and political programs.
 - b. Instrumental music in worship.
 - c. Female preachers.
 - d. The wearing of religious titles like "Reverend," and "Father."
 - e. Tithing.
 - f. Infant baptism.
 - g. Sprinkling or pouring for baptism.
 - h. Accepting people who are openly sinning into membership.
 - i. Inherited sin.
 - j. Once saved, always saved.
 - k. Salvation by faith alone.
 - l. Worship of Mary.
 - m. Denial of the Deity of Christ.
 - n. Direct operation of the Holy Spirit.
 - o. Modern miraculous gifts.
 - 2. The New Testament does not authorize any of these doctrines or practices for the church today!
- G. Denominationalism results in worthless worship.
 - 1. Jesus said that if we based our worship on the doctrines of men, then our worship will be in vain (Matt. 15:7-9).

2. He also said that, of all religious people who call him “Lord,” only those who actually do the will of God will be saved (Matt. 7:21-23).

III. What Is The Solution To The Problem Of Denominationalism?

- A. Get back to the Bible!
 1. We cannot have a relationship with God if we go beyond the doctrine of Christ.
 - a. 2 Jn. 9.
 - b. 1 Cor. 4:6.
 2. We must reject all man-made doctrines, religious groups, and practices and accept only those things that are authorized by the doctrine of Christ.
- B. Have unity based on following the gospel of Christ!
 1. The first followers of Christ had unity (Acts 4:32).
 2. Why did they enjoy unity (Acts 2:42)?
 3. Christ expects his followers to have unity today.
 - a. Jn. 17:20-21.
 - b. 1 Cor. 1:10.
 - c. Eph. 4:4-6.

Conclusion:

- A. Yes, there are thousands of denominations in existence today.
- B. But the truth is that there should not be any.
- C. Denominationalism does not have, and never has had, the approval of heaven.