

## What Does the Bible Teach About Denominationalism #4

Introduction:

- A. Throughout church history there have always been groups of Christians following Christ according to the New Testament pattern.
  - 1. They were considered heretics by mainstream Christianity.
  - 2. History did not mention them because it believed them small, eccentric, and irrelevant.
  - 3. Today, there are thousands of congregations composed of Christians who follow Jesus without denominational creeds and organizations.
  - 4. There are many churches true to the example and pattern of the Lord's church as found in the New Testament.
- B. How does one find a New Testament church today?
  - 1. Where would he begin and what would he look for?

### I. BEGIN WITH THE NAME

- A. It demonstrates whether or not the church is concerned with following Jesus or a denominational platform.
  - 1. If it is a denominational name, it is a denominational church and not the Lord's Church.
- B. The name should be a scriptural name.
  - 1. There is really no single scriptural name for the Lord's Church in the New Testament; most commonly used names are:
    - a. Church of God - 1Cor. 1:2
    - b. Churches of God - 1Thes. 2:14
    - c. Churches of Christ - Rom. 16:16
  - 2. Other terms are used that reflect association with God and Christ
    - a. Body of Christ - Eph. 1:22-23
    - b. Kingdom of God - Acts 28:31
    - c. Bride of Christ - Rev. 21:9
    - d. General assembly and church of the Firstborn - Heb. 12:23
    - e. Church of the living God - 1Tim. 3:15
  - 3. The use of a scriptural name instead of a man-made name indicates a desire to follow the Scriptures, not human traditions.
- C. However, the name alone is not a certain guide.
  - 1. The name Mr. President alone is not a sure guide if one were seeking the leader of the free world; for there are a lot of people who hold the office of president in many different corporations, clubs, and governments around the world. But only one who bears the name is the President of the United States.
  - 2. There may be many congregations that bear the name of Christ that may not be the one, true church.
    - a. There are over 200 separate denominations that use the expression Church of God.
    - b. There many organizations called Churches of Christ that are as denominational as any church with a denominational name.
      - 1) International Churches of Christ - part of the cultic discipling movement that started as Crossroads and was taken over by Kip McKean of the Boston Church.

- 2) United Church of Christ is part of the Unitarian-Universalist denomination that grew out of the New England Congregationalist Church.
  - 3) Church of Christ (Disciples Movement) is a digression from Alexander Campbell's work started in Bethany, WV.
  - 4) A number of branches of mainstream denominations have adopted the name Church of Christ in addition to their denominational identity; such as: Missionary and Primitive Baptists, Anglican and Episcopal subsets, house church and community Bible churches, and even some Catholics, Pentecostals, and Presbyterians.
3. Nevertheless, one should still begin with the name, and in particular those congregations that use the name church of Christ.
    - a. But even when one has found a church that has a non- denominational name--that does not automatically mean the people are truly members of the Lord's church.

## II. EXAMINE THE MESSAGE PREACHED

- A. The importance of the message
  1. One is called through the gospel - 2Thes. 2:14.
  2. As one obeys the gospel call, the Lord adds him to His body, the church - Acts 2:41, 47.
  3. The gospel not be perverted in any way - Gal. 1:6-9.
- B. If the message is different by changing either the facts or commands of the gospel, then people are not being saved, and the Lord is not adding them to His church.
- C. A church with a perverted gospel may have the nicest people, but they are still unsaved people.
  1. They may wear the name of Christ, both as individuals and as a church, but they are not truly the people of God.
  2. While a group of people may identify themselves as a church of Christ, it is only Christ who truly makes them such when they properly respond to the call of the authentic gospel. That is why it is imperative a church teaches the pure and simple gospel of Christ.

## III. COMPARE THE PRACTICE WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN

- A. The New Testament presents a pattern for the worship, work, organization of the church, by means of the apostles' doctrine.
  1. Heb. 8:5; 2Tim. 1:13; Acts 2:42
- B. A church abiding in the apostles' doctrine will reflect this pattern
  1. Their **worship** will be like that described in the New Testament, involving such elements as:
    - a. Singing - Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19
    - b. Prayer - Col. 4:2
    - c. Preaching - Acts 20:7
    - d. Communion - 1Cor. 10:16-17, 11:23-29
    - e. Offering - 1Cor. 16:1-2
    - f. Their assemblies were designed to edify and provoke one another to love and good works - Heb. 10:23-25.
  2. Their **work** as a congregation will follow the pattern found in scripture.
    - a. Equipping the saints for ministry (edification) - Eph. 4:11-16,

- b. Furthering the spread of the gospel by supplying and sending out evangelists (evangelism) - Phil. 4:15-16; 3John 5-8,
  - c. Meeting the needs of the saints as problems arise (limited benevolence) - Rom. 15:25-26; 1Cor. 16:1-4; 2Cor. 8:1 - 9:15.
3. Their **organization** as a congregation will be that which is found in the New Testament - Phil. 1:1
- a. With elders (also known as bishops, pastors, presbyters, and shepherds) qualified to oversee and tend to the local congregation - Acts 14:23, 20:28; 1Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1Peter 5:1-4,
  - b. With deacons also qualified to serve as they minister to the local congregation - 1Tim. 3:8-13,
  - c. With saints (members) who sojourn in this world with conduct that is honorable and which gives glory to God - 1Peter 2:9-12.

Conclusion:

- A. By carefully studying the pattern of the Lord's church as revealed in the New Testament, we can know when a congregation is faithfully observing the apostles' doctrine authorized by Jesus Christ.
  - 1. This places upon each of us the responsibility of carefully studying the Scriptures; for only then, can we be able to distinguish between the one, true church and the multitude of counterfeits created by men.
  - 2. This will not be just another denomination, but simply a church of the Lord, a congregation of disciples that meet together to worship God and edify one another in their service to God without the division generated by the creeds and names of men.
  - 3. John 17:20-23

*(Material compiled by Paul R. Blake, January 2004, for the Tomlinson Run Church of Christ. Acknowledgements to "The New Testament Church" by Roy Cogdill, "Christ's Body, The Church" by James D. Bales, "Following Jesus Without Denominationalism" by Mark Copeland, and "Sound Doctrine" by C.R. Nichol and R.L. Whiteside)*