

IS DENOMINATIONALISM SCRIPTURAL?

Intro: Almost all religious people today appear to have accepted the denominational concept of the church. By that I mean, the idea that there are many churches that God approves of, and that they may be variously denominated, or named; or that God's universal church is made up many different groups.

There are many reasons why denominationalism is popular.

It has an inclusive appeal--it suggests that more people are saved than those who follow a specific way of salvation and doctrine, so it is the most inclusive view of religion.

It fits the times—our own constitution seeks to afford the right of all people to practice the faith of their choice and we are urged politically urged to accept the idea that all religious faiths have equal validity. In the addition, the spirit of the age is "live and let live".

It is the course of least resistance--it does not call upon men to change but stay where they are; it does not call upon men to study and determine the truth, but believe what they will. It does not call on the diligence and effort to evangelize; for from this point of view few are lost.

It has the appearance of promoting unity--denominationalism seems to be the answer to the nagging question of religious division. At least this view seems for suggest a basis for unity--we'll agree to disagree and accept each other in spite of our disagreements.

And so, I urge you to seek a reasoned answer to this question--a Bible answer. Is denominationalism Biblical? And does God approve of it?

DENOMINATIONALISM LEADS TO THE LOGICAL ABSURDITY THAT MILLIONS OF PEOPLE CAN ALL DISAGREE AND ALL BE RIGHT

Most people know very little about what they believe, much less about what others believe. And for this reason, the tendency is to think that all religious people believe basically the same thing. Hence, denominationalism is no big deal.

But, the truth is. The reason why we have so many churches is because people haven't agreed on what the Bible teaches; and those disagreements were important enough to somebody to establish new churches over them!

Consider the religious diversity denominationalism offers:

About God--Is the Godhead made up of one person or three? Does he control the world absolutely and predestine everything so that men are without free moral agency? Or does he give men measures of freedom to choose his will? Will he punish sinners in hell or simply annihilate them at the end or perhaps let everybody go to heaven after all?

About salvation--Does God save those he chooses by miraculous influence? Does he offer a way to salvation that men choose? Are there conditions to meet? Are we saved as infants when we're sprinkled? Or as adults when we're baptized? Or when we've made

a mental commitment to Christ? Which is the proper way to the forgiveness of sins? Catholic sacramentalism, Baptist regenerationism, Reformed predestinationism. All of these profoundly different.

And the list goes on and on. We do not agree on the most fundamental points about God and salvation, much less worship, work, organization, designation and a host of other spiritual matters.

Are you prepared to say that all of these contradictory views are right?

Denominationalism virtually obliterates the concept of truth! Yet the teaching of Christ affirms that salvation is predicated upon knowing the truth!

Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32)

DENOMINATIONALISM CONTRADICTS THE TEACHING AND PRACTICE OF JESUS

Jesus taught that there was one way to God and rejection of God's way brought condemnation.

He showed that substituting man's doctrines for God revealed an alienated heart and would result in rejection by the Lord.

"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 'But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'" (Matthew 15:7-9)

The disciples appear to have been disturbed by Jesus' stinging renunciation of the Pharisees. They asked, "Did you know that the Pharisees were offended by what you said".

But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up. "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." (Matthew 15:13-14)

He showed that professing Lordship was not enough, if people rejected God's will and substituted their own (what Jesus called "iniquity" (lawlessness) they would be rejected at the judgment.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

He solemnly urged all men to accept His teaching as the only way to God!

Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. (John 14:6)

Because of these things Jesus did not accept the various religious sects that existed during his generation. Instead he called upon them to leave their mistaken understanding in repentance and accept God's true way! Can we follow Jesus and do any less?

DENOMINATIONALISM PROMOTES DIVISION RATHER THAN UNITY

It is interesting to note that denominationalism is often offered as the indication of unity among professed followers of Jesus. So the argument goes, we acknowledge and accept each other in spite of our differences and this proves that we are “one” in Christ.

Is this the “oneness” Jesus prayed for?

“And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. “I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. (John 17:19-21)

Is your concept of the unity of the Father and Son like this? The Father has one set of views; the son has another and they have agreed to accept each other in spite of them?

This text serves as a backdrop for a number of apostolic exhortations. Consider them:

Is this the “oneness” the apostles pled for?

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Contextually the congregation at Corinth was divided into parties based upon loyalty to men. Paul’s corrective was to unite them based on loyalty to Jesus based on his self-less sacrifice for all of them! being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:3-6)

Today religious people have essential abandoned the gospel essentials that make people disciples. Paul urged them to preserve this unity and in the spirit of it press toward complete knowledge of Christ and spiritual maturity through it!

Conclusion: Denominationalism is popular; but it is not scriptural. God’s truth cannot be surrendered for the sake of religious political correctness.

Our appeal is for you not to join the church of your choice; but rather to be added to the church of God’s choice, by obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ.