

FOR PREACHING AGAINST DENOMINATIONALISM (Matthew 16:15-19)

I. What is denominationalism?

- A. The Westminster Dictionary of Church History defines it as: “The system and ideology founded on the division of the religious population into numerous ecclesiastical bodies, each stressing particular values or traditions, and each competing with the other in the same community under substantial conditions of freedom.”
- B. The American Heritage Dictionary defines denomination as: “A large group of religious organizations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy.”
 - 1. The idea is that by a common name and being tied to a certain governing body that is above the local congregation, they are “denominated” from all congregations that are not under the same authority.
 - 2. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church is that denomination that has the pope as its head.
 - 3. The Southern Baptist Church is that group of churches that submits to the authority of the Southern Baptist Convention.
 - 4. The Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) is a denomination comprised of those churches that submit to the synod in Missouri
- C. So denominationalism is the splitting up into various religious denominations, each of which are governed by some person or body that decides things for them.
- D. Br. Wayne Jackson wrote an article and noticed several flaws in the definition of denominationalism:
 - 1. Denominationalism is a result of division;
 - 2. The ideology accommodates various “ecclesiastical (church) bodies” with distinct doctrinal differences.
 - 3. Denominationalism tends to focus more on tradition and preferred values than scripture;
 - 4. The system encourages an air of adversarial rivalry and not cooperation;
 - 5. This concept encourages the idea that the freedom to differ on major points of doctrine is spiritually healthy.
- E. As you can see, when compared to what Jesus and His apostles taught about the church Jesus would and did build, there are major differences between the two.

II. Denominationalism is sinful.

- A. It is sinful because it has no scriptural basis for existence.
 - 1. You can’t find any passage in the New Testament that supports any denomination being in existence.
 - 2. In the New Testament, local churches were never divided into differing bodies with differing beliefs.
 - 3. There was no way this could be the case because the same thing

- was being taught everywhere by the apostles (1 Corinthians 4:17).
- B. When you read the New Testament, we see several things about the local congregation:
 - 1. Each congregation was autonomous (self-governing);
 - 2. Each one was overseen by elders from that particular congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2).
 - 3. The only authority above the local congregation was Christ and His apostles.
 - 4. The apostles were not replaced when they died, except for Judas.
 - 5. Jesus is head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23).
 - C. Denominationalism is against scripture as well.
 - 1. It goes against what Jesus prayed for, recorded in John 17:20-23.
 - 2. The attitude behind it is condemned in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13.
 - 3. Being divided is shown to be a sign of being worldly minded (1 Corinthians 3:3-4).
 - 4. It goes against the work of Jesus on the cross (Ephesians 2:14-16).
 - D. It hurts the cause of Christ.
 - 1. Unity is a sign to the world that Jesus is Lord (John 17:21), therefore disunity hurts Christ.
 - 2. The religious division that exists is used by atheists and others as a reason not to obey the Lord.
 - 3. Not only that, it has given rise to other false religions.
 - a. Mormonism came out of a reaction against the denominationalism of Joseph Smith's day.
 - b. The Jehovah's Witness group uses religious division to encourage people to follow their false doctrine.
 - E. The fact is, denominationalism is sinful and the sin of it is seen in the definition of it.

III. We can't be part of the problem.

- A. No matter what others may teach, we must always stand for truth.
 - 1. When God's people compromise on this issue, we become part of the problem.
 - 2. We see such compromise when denominational speakers are allowed in our pulpits.
 - 3. When preachers and elders show support for those in this sin in various ways.
 - 4. We can't use the gospel to call someone out of the world when we are in the world ourselves.
- B. We promote denominationalism when we speak like we are part of one.
 - 1. When we say things like, "I'm church of Christ" or "We're church of Christ" we are speaking in denominational terms.
 - 2. When we refer to me or any gospel preacher as a "church of Christ preacher" we are speaking in denominational terms.
 - 3. Individuals cannot be "church of Christ" because the church belonging to Christ is made up of individuals.
 - 4. Someone can be Baptist, Methodist or Episcopal but they can't be

“church of Christ.

5. All the phrase “church of Christ” means is that it belongs to Christ.
- C. We are non-denominational to the core and we need to remember that.
- D. Whenever we do things in ways that denominations do them or speak in ways that denominational people do, we are a part of the problem.
- E. We are to be leading others to something that is different from them not just like them but with a different name.

Material in this sermon came from an article by Wayne Jackson entitled “Denominationalism: Permissible or Reprehensible?” at christiancourier.com and a sermon outline by Mark Copeland.