

How to Solve the Problem of Denominations

Viewing what society calls “Christianity,” we see hundreds of different denominations that disagree with one another in name, organization, doctrine, worship, and plan of salvation. Yet they all claim to please God. ***In this study we want to consider whether or not the Bible itself has a solution to the problems caused by denominational division.***

Consider the following steps to solve the problem:

I. Understand the Bible Concept of the Church.

Ephesians 3:10,11 says the church is part of God’s eternal wisdom.

A. Bible Meanings of the Word “Church”

The church in the “universal” sense

The “universal” church refers to the body or group of all saved people everywhere.

Matthew 16:18 – Jesus promised to build the church that belongs to Him.

Ephesians 5:23,25 – Jesus is head of His body and gave Himself for the church

Acts 2:47 – The Lord adds to the church those who are saved.

When God saves people, He puts them in the church. In this sense, the church is singular.

[Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18,24; 1 Timothy 3:15; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 to Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16.]

The church in the “local” sense

A “local” church is a congregation of Christians in a region, who have united themselves to work and worship together.

Acts 8:1 – The church which was in Jerusalem

1 Corinthians 1:2 – The church of God which was at Corinth

1 Thessalonians 2:14 – Churches of God which were in Judea

Revelation 1:4,11 – The seven churches of Asia

Galatians 1:2 – The churches of Galatia

“Church” in this sense can be plural (Romans 16:16). Congregations existed in different localities, but they all had the same pattern of organization, doctrine, worship, salvation, etc.

[Acts 11:22; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 8:1; Galatians 1:22; 1 Corinthians 16:1; Romans 16:1,4; 1 Corinthians 14:33.]

B. The Denominational Concept of the Church

A denomination involves all the following elements:

* Each denomination is an affiliation or confederation of a number of local churches.

* Each denomination has its own peculiar name, doctrine, organization, plan of worship, etc.

* Each claims it is composed of Christians, but it does not claim to contain all Christians.

So we hear: “There are saved people in all the denominations.” “We’re all going to heaven, just by different routes.” “One church is as good as another.” So “join the church of your choice.”

Denominations exist because men changed God’s plan for the church.

God’s plan involves all saved people in one universal body, yet associated together in local churches. Denominationalism added the concept of associations of local churches that contain some of the saved but not all of the saved. The result is confusion and division.

1 Corinthians 14:33 – God Himself says that He is not the author of confusion.

Proverbs 3:5,6 – We must not lean on our understanding but must trust in God.

Proverbs 14:12 – There are ways that seem right to men, but their end is death

Matthew 15:9,13,14 – Human traditions and commands make our service to God vain

In order to solve the problem of denominationalism, the first step is to leave off the human changes and go back to God’s original plan in the New Testament.

[See also Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Isaiah 55:8,9; Jeremiah 10:23; Colossians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-5.]

II. Appreciate the Bible Teaching About Unity

Each denomination contradicts and disagrees with other denominations. Yet the denominational concept says, “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you worship God.”

John 17:20-23

Jesus prayed for all who believe on Him to be one as He and His Father are one. But John 12:49,50 says they both taught and practiced the same things.

[Cf. John 14:31; 15:10; 17:17.]

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

Paul pled with the Corinthians that there be no divisions among them. Is Christ divided? Does He contradict Himself or teach contradictory things to His followers? If everyone would learn His teachings, we could all be united by following Him.

Ephesians 4:3-6

For each of the seven things listed, there is only one of each in God’s true plan. Just as there is one true God and Father, so there is only one true body and only one true faith, and that body is Jesus’ church (Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:23-25; Colossians 1:18,24).

God teaches that, instead of many differing churches, there should be only one true church, and we can all be members of that one church by following the true faith revealed in the gospel.

[See also 1 Corinthians 14:33; 3:3; 12:12,13,20; Philippians 1:27; Ephesians 2:16; Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 12:4,5.]

III. Honor the Bible Concept of Truth

Would you join a church that taught all the following things:

- * We follow the Bible as our sole guide, but also follow the Book of Mormon and the Koran.
- * We believe that a child of God can and cannot so sin as to be eternally lost.
- * We believe that immersion is the only true form of baptism, but we also sprinkle and pour.
- * We believe that man is justified by faith alone, but obedience is also essential.
- * We believe that the Old Testament law has been removed, but we also bind it as law.
- * We worship only the God of the Bible, but we also worship the sun, moon, stars.

If it does not matter what church you join, why not join this church? If it doesn’t matter if different churches teach contradictory doctrines, why would it matter if the same church taught contradictory doctrines? How can all the denominations be following Jesus when the denominations contradict one another?

The real problem is that ***such contradictory beliefs cannot all be true!***

The importance of truth

John 8:32 – We must know the truth to be made free from sin (verse 34).

John 17:17 – God’s word is truth.

1 Peter 1:22,23 – Obedience to the truth purifies us from sin.

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 – Believing error and lies leads to condemnation.

Galatians 1:6-9 – Any man is accursed if he preaches a different gospel.

2 John 9 – Whoever does not abide in Jesus’ doctrine does not have God.

The basic problem with saying that it does not matter what denomination you join is that would mean that ***error is just as good as truth!*** The answer is to study, learn, and follow the true teaching of Jesus revealed in the one true gospel. [See also Revelation 22:18,19.]

Conclusion

Acts 2:38,47 – Repent and be baptized for remission of sins, then God will add you to His true church. In the first century, obeying Jesus’ true gospel made people members of Jesus’ one true church. That gospel can have the same effect in your life as it did in theirs.

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