

Why The Church Of Christ Is Not A Denomination

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Jesus said: "Upon this rock I will build my church." (Matt. 16:18.) The word "my" is defined by Webster as: "of or belonging to me." When Christ said, "I will build my church," of course, he meant that the church he would build was to be of himself and was to belong to him. So, we read in the New Testament of "the church of the Lord" (Acts 20:28); "the church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2); "the church" (Eph. 1:22.) It is noticeable to the student of the New Testament that we never read of different denominations as branches of the church. Denominations have come into existence since the close of the New Testament period and without the authority of God. This thought may be impressed upon our minds by simply asking the question: "Which denomination did Jesus have in mind when he said, 'upon this rock I will build my church'?" Of course, the answer is that he had no denomination in mind. That being true, Jesus did not promise to build a denomination or denominations. From this thought we gather three important lessons. Jesus did not promise to build a denomination, therefore: (1) all denominations exist without the authority of Christ; (2) no denomination that exists today is the church of Christ, or "the church of the Lord;" (3) the church of Christ, or the church that Jesus built, is not a denomination.

Since the church that Jesus built is not a denomination, all loyal members of that church are opposed to denominationalism. By dying for but one church, Jesus demonstrated his desire for unity among his followers. (Acts 20:28; Jno. 17:21.) Denominationalism destroys unity among those who would follow Christ. One cannot consistently claim to be a member of the church of Christ and a denomination at the same time. The success of one means the failure of the other.

Honest hearts will inquire: "How may I become a member of the Lord's church and not join a denomination?" The answer: Go to the book that tells all about the church that is of Christ and nothing about denominationalism. Go to the Bible! One who takes the Bible as his only rule of faith and practice is sure to learn all there is to know about the Lord's church. He will be certain to learn but one thing about denominationalism and that is, that is wrong. Since the Bible tells nothing of modern denominations, one cannot become a member of a denomination by following the Bible. Since the Bible tells all about the church that Jesus built, one cannot become a member of it without following the Bible. If one cannot join a denomination by following the Bible, and cannot become a member of the church of Christ without following the Bible, surely the church of Christ is not a denomination!

Let us give attention to some very definite reasons why the church of Christ is not a denomination:

(1) It does not have a denominational head. Christ is the head of his church. (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23.) He is the only head of his church. No man, nor group of men, upon this earth have the right to legislate for the Lord's church. All authority rests with him. (Matt. 28:19.) Sometimes the question is asked of members of the church of Christ: "Doesn't the church of Christ have headquarters somewhere?" What prompts this question? Is it not the fact that the various denominations have their headquarters on earth with legislative, judicial, and executive authority vested in some man, or a group of men? The headquarters of the church of Christ is in Heaven. Christ is head and his throne is headquarters.

(2) It does not have a denominational organization. This follows what we have just been saying. Modern denominations are highly organized. Each congregation

is tied to all other congregations in that denomination by a man-made machine or organization. Therefore, we read of the activities of conferences, councils, conventions, etc. The church of Christ knows no such organization. Its organization is fashioned after the New Testament pattern. Each congregation is a unit within itself. No two congregations are tied together by human organization. The only officers known to it are elders and deacons. (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim. 3; Phil. 1:1.) Each congregation has its own elders and deacons. No elder, nor deacon, can function with authority in more than one congregation at a time. The only way the various local congregations of the church of Christ are tied together is simply and only as they are related through Christ.

(3) It does not have a denominational name. The church of Christ accepts only such names as are found in the New Testament applied to the church. (Acts 20:28; Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23.) Individual members of the church wear only the name "Christian." The name in which Peter said we should glorify God (1 Pet. 4:16); the name that was worn by the disciples in New Testament times (Acts 11:26); the name that Paul tried to persuade Agrippa to wear. (Acts 26:28.)

(4) It does not hold to a denominational doctrine. People who are members of the church of Christ did not join it. They were "added to" it by the Lord when they obeyed the gospel of Christ. (Acts 2:47.) Members of denominations have been led to think that they entered into Christ by doing one thing and later joined a denomination by a different procedure. The New Testament clearly shows that all who are in Christ are in his church, and that all who are saved are in the church. The same thing that makes one a child of God also causes that one to be added to the church of the Lord. Those who obey the gospel are saved. (Rom. 1:16.) The saved are added to the church. (Acts 2:47.)

(5) It is not denominational in its work and worship. Denominations work through human societies and other organizations. They have introduced into the worship things for which there is no authority in the Bible. The church of Christ adheres strictly to the Bible in its plan of work and worship. All work, such as preaching the gospel and works of benevolence, is done in the name of Christ (Col. 3:17) and through the church. (Eph. 3:21.) This means that Christ is authority for what is done and that God is glorified in the church. No missionary societies nor charitable institutions, with their glory-taking, fee-grabbing ways, are employed. Nothing is used as an item of worship in the church of Christ which is not commanded by Christ and his apostles. The worship of the church was not designed to entertain, but to edify. Therefore, only such items as are authorized in the New Testament are accepted.

Conclusion: Followers of Christ in New Testament times were not denominationalists. If we reproduce the exact pattern of the church they were members of, how can we be members of a denomination?

(This article by bro. Cox is more than 26 years old and shows how he preached and wrote at that time. We believe it to be appropriate for the present and hope you profit from reading it. LB)