

# Is Denominationalism God's Pattern for the Church?

## Vines and Branches - **John 15:1-8**

- ▶ It has been argued by some that this text is justification for the denominational concept of the church.
- ▶ The premise is that Jesus is the vine, and various denominations (or churches) are the branches.
  - As long as certain “core principles” are adhered to, then denominations are acceptable to God.

# Vines and Branches - **John 15:1-8**

- ▶ I find this concept contrary to what the Bible teaches, INCLUDING this context.
- ▶ Consider
  - **15:8** - *“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”* Jesus defined the branches!
  - Consider references to individuals throughout the context - “you”, “him”, “he”, “anyone”, etc.

# Vines and Branches - **John 15:1-8**

- ▶ I find this concept contrary to what the Bible teaches, INCLUDING this context.
- ▶ Consider
  - In a vineyard, various branches do NOT produce different types of grapes.
  - **Vs. 2, 6** declare the unproductive branches will be taken away and burned (judged). Biblical judgment is addressed to individuals (**Revelation 20:12-15, 2 Corinthians 5:10**, etc.)
  - Also, there is NO mention of the church in ANY form in the context.

# Is denominationalism God's Pattern?

- ▶ With this understanding, let us consider the subject of denominationalism today.
- ▶ In any town, large or small, you will typically find multitudes of different churches.

In a diverse society this may seem good, but is this really what God wants?

- ▶ Let's open our Bibles and consider what God's word says about His church as it relates to denominationalism.

# Definitions - church

- ▶ What is the church?
- ▶ From the Greek word, ἐκκλησία, (ekklēsia), a word that has reference to an assembly. In the Bible is the “called out” assembly of God’s people.

# Definitions - church

## ▶ What is the church?

Every reference to the church in the New Testament has one or both of these uses in mind.

**There is no earthly organization larger than the local church to whom we answer**

# Definitions - Denomination

- ▶ “a large group of congregations united under a common faith and name, usually organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy.”  
(American Heritage Dictionary, ©2020)
- ▶ Typically, denominations distinguish themselves from others in practice, doctrine, etc., while professing union in other matters.



## Definition - Denominationalism?

- ▶ The belief that the whole body of Christ consists of the many different denominations.

“The tendency to separate into religious denominations”

(American Heritage Dictionary, ©2020)

- ▶ In this lesson, the various bodies that admit they are not exclusively the ONE church we read of in the Bible.

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ First, It redefines the New Testament church
- ▶ The concept of the body of Christ (church) being a group of denominations is foreign to scripture.
- ▶ It adds a layer of organization larger than a local church (earthly headquarters, governing bodies that make decisions for local churches - synods, councils, conventions, etc.)

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

▶ First, It redefines the New Testament church

▶ The Bible teaches there is ONE church - **Matthew 16:18** “I will build My church”

**Ephesians 4:4**, “there is one body...”

(cf. **Ephesians 1:22-23** - Christ is head over all things to the church, which is His body...)

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ First, It redefines the New Testament church
- ▶ When the Bible speaks of ONE church, it is comprised of the saved (Christians) -  
**1 Corinthians 12:27,**  
**Romans 12:4-5**  
(same is true of a local church)
- ▶ The body of Christ is NOT a group of churches (either denominations or congregations)
- ▶ **Denominationalism restructures this**

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ First, It redefines the New Testament church
- ▶ Consider **Ephesians 3:10-11** - the church
  - makes known the manifold (many-sided) wisdom of God
  - was according to His eternal purpose
- ▶ **When we change or restructure His pattern, what are we saying about His wisdom and plans?**

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ Second, It conflicts with the Biblical teaching of unity
- ▶ Denominationalism promotes doctrinal division. Whether intentional or not, it divides!
- ▶ Consider **John 17:20-21** - how does Jesus want us to be united?
- ▶ **1 Corinthians 1:10-13** - Paul challenges us to speak the same thing
- ▶ Consider **1 Corinthian 4:17, Revelation 2:11, etc.**
- ▶ Denominations do NOT speak the same thing!

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ Third, It renders God's truth irrelevant
- ▶ The Bible teaches that truth matters
- ▶ Truth IS relevant - **John 8:32, 17:17**  
- Jesus taught it
- ▶ **Galatians 1:6-9** - one gospel  
**2 John 9-11** - to transgress is to set aside
- ▶ We **MUST** respect God's pattern in His word!

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ **Third, It renders God's truth irrelevant**
- ▶ With denominations, if you do not like what one church teaches, go find another one that teaches what you want. There is NO doctrine that cannot be justified if you are willing to keep looking - matters of worship, organization, work, leadership, morality, family, etc. Who is God, Jesus, evolution, is the Bible inerrant, etc. >>>



# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ Third, It renders God's truth irrelevant
- ▶ Whether intended or not, denominationalism enables this, especially when we consider the progressive attitudes so prevalent in society today.

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ Fourth, it causes confusion
- ▶ There are hundreds (or thousands) of different denominations today
- ▶ How many today, seeing all the different churches say, “How can I know which one is right?” and thereby believe it is impossible to know the truth? >>>

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ Fourth, it causes confusion
- ▶ How many use this divisive teaching to condemn God and the Bible?
- ▶ Add to this the mantra, “Attend the church of your choice” or “It doesn’t matter what we believe, as long as we are sincere”, etc., confusion is increased.

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ Fourth, it causes confusion
- ▶ It DOES matter what we believe (cf. **Matthew 7:21-23**, **Luke 6:46**, cf. **2 Peter 3:15-16**).
- ▶ **1 Corinthians 14:33** - God is NOT the author of confusion.  
**Ephesians 5:17** - a command  
**Acts 17:30-31** - He will not tolerate ignorance

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ Fourth, it causes confusion
- ▶ Notice again **John 17:20-21** - what unity produces - *that the world may believe that you sent Me*
- ▶ Our best opportunity to reach the world is to first come to agreement

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ Fifth, it puts the desires of men above that of God
  - ▶ The Bible is filled with examples of false worship
    - the golden calf (**Exodus 32:1-10**)
    - Jeroboam's worship (**1 Kings 12:25-33**)
    - Traditions setting aside God's word (**Matthew 15:3-9, Romans 10:1-3, etc.**)
- These all started with man doing what he wanted to do instead of what God commanded

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ Fifth, it puts the desires of men above that of God

- ▶ Denominationalism is really about “What do I want?”

How many today pick a church based upon externals?

Is it entertaining? Will it allow me to continue to...? What social programs do you offer?

- ▶ Many are like the rich, young ruler - **Matthew 19:16-22** - BUT notice the response of Jesus.

# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ Fifth, it puts the desires of men above that of God
- ▶ Consider, if I can do whatever I want and be accepted, why should I challenge my own beliefs to ensure that I am right?

**2 Thessalonians 2:11-12**



# Why is denominationalism wrong?

- ▶ Sixth, it renders worship to God vain (empty)
- ▶ **Matthew 15:1-2**, Jesus questioned about His disciples not washing their hands
- ▶ **15:3-6** - He challenged their teachings as from men
- ▶ **15:7-9** - “in vain they worship Me teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.”

# How can I avoid denominationalism?

1. Determine that I am going to seek and speak the truth - **2 Timothy 2:15**, **Acts 17:11** - keep studying
2. Respect God's boundaries - **1 Corinthians 4:6**, **2 John 9**, cf. **Revelation 22:18-19**
3. Work at unity - resolve to NEVER compromise the truth for the sake of unity! **Philippians 2:1-4**, **Ephesians 4:1-3**, etc.

# How can I avoid denominationalism?

4. Find a church that:
  - Places truth over convenience
  - Respects God's boundaries concerning its purpose and work
  - Worships to please God rather than man (respecting His pattern)
  - Teaches God's true plan of salvation
  - Avoids denominational names and teachings.

Are you seeking  
the church of Christ's  
choice?

Let us pray!