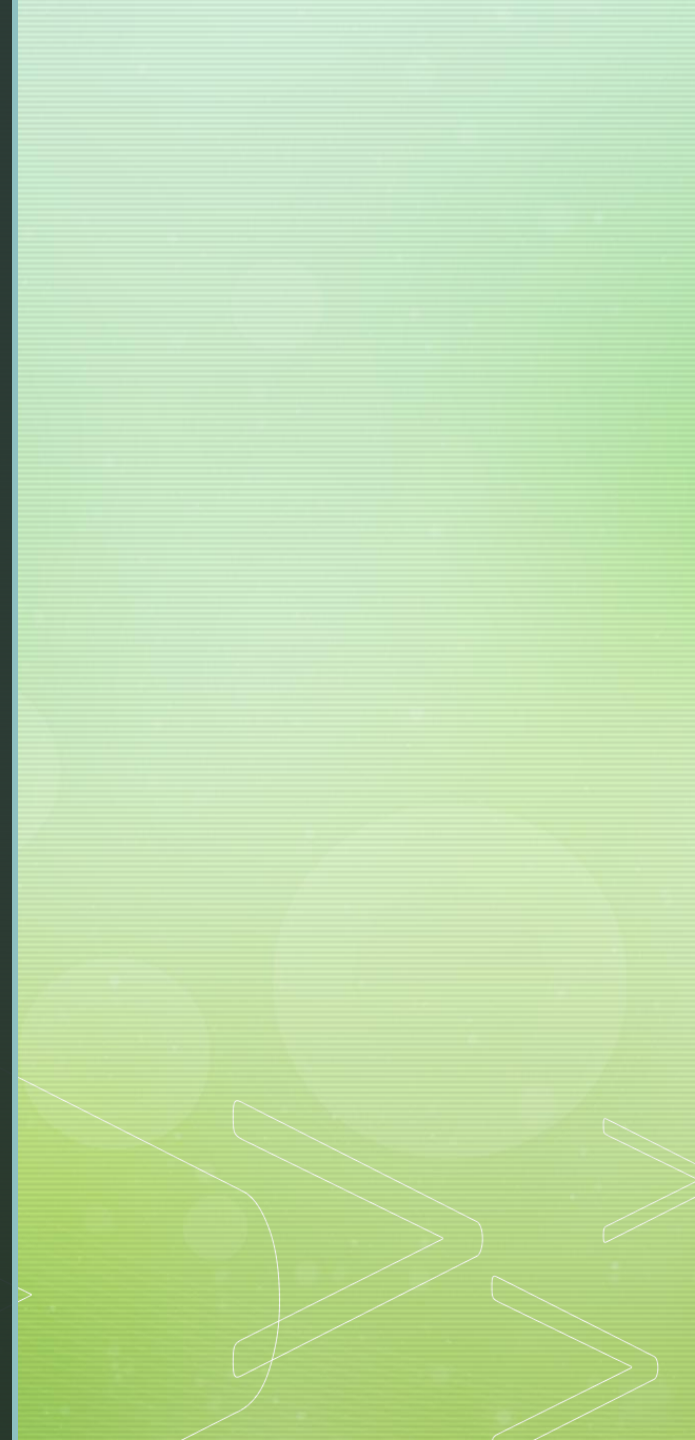


Answering the Justification for Denominations



Introduction

- This morning we presented a lesson on why denominations are not God's intention for the church.
- But the concept of denominations is defended by many, if not most.
- Tonight I would like to examine some arguments that have been made to justify denominations as an acceptable part of the Lord's church.
- NOTE: As we begin, most sources acknowledge that denominations were not present in Bible times (1st century AD), but came later. THAT within itself ought to refute any case for their acceptance.

John 15:1-8 – the Vine and branches

- Some have advocated that when Jesus was speaking of being the Vine and we are branches, that various branches could be descriptive of different denominations connected to Him. Thus as long as we are in “the Vine”, which denomination we are part of does not matter.

John 15:1-8 – the Vine and branches

- Answer: When you consider the context – Jesus was clearly speaking of individuals, especially His apostles. (**John 13-16**)
- The subject had to do with growth which was based on abiding “in Him” (**Cf. John 8:31-32**) and not depending on yourself.
- Furthermore, the message of the various branches was a united message.
- Does a vine produce different types of fruit? This is addressed as Paul went to the Gentiles – **Galatians 2:8-9, 2 Peter 3:16, etc.**
- ALSO, the fruit produced is based on abiding in Him, NOT the innovations of man (incl. denominations).

1 Cor. 12:12-27 – Christ is head, we are parts

- Similar to the **John 15** some advocate that the various “parts” could be different denominations working in tandem to help the body function.
- Again the context addresses this argument.
- Paul is dealing with individual members (**cf. 1 Cor. 1:2**) who were not behaving properly toward one another. His point was we need to function as a healthy body with every part doing its share.
The goal was no “schism” (**vs. 25**, tears, factions).

1 Cor. 12:12-27 – Christ is head, we are parts

- Paul's point was they needed to speak the same thing and be united in that (**1 Cor. 1:10**)
- Be definition, denominations speak different things and are doctrinally divided.
- A body acting like that would be unhealthy.
- **1 Cor. 12:27** – you are members individually – advocating complete unity, not simply “let's agree to disagree”

As long as we agree on key concepts

- Some defend denominations by stating that as long we agree on core values that must be accepted (e.g., A list might include: The Bible is inspired, the Triune God, Jesus came in human form, salvation is the result of the cross, the church is His body, and there will be a final judgment), that all other matters (e.g., baptism, how to worship, which church organization, some moral issues, end times beliefs, etc.) are left to an individual's discretion, including which denomination (or none) one chooses to affiliate with.

As long as we agree on key concepts

- WHY are certain doctrines necessary, but others are not?
- AND who gets to decide which ones are necessary?
- The Bible emphasizes complete obedience –
Matthew 7:21-23
- **Ephesians 4:4-6** describes unity that goes beyond “core values” (one body, faith, baptism).
- **1 Corinthians 4:16-17** – Paul taught the same thing in every church.
- **Galatians 1:6-9** - to teach a different gospel is to be accursed.
- We must respect what God teaches in all matters.
We seek to follow His pattern as closely as we can.

All denominations teach some truth

- I believe this to be a true statement.
In fact, many denominations might teach MOST of what is truth. I align with many “core values”.
- BUT is that enough?
- Can an atheist, humanist, Muslim or Buddhist hold to some truth? Can they have high moral standards?
- **Acts 20:27** – Paul declared “the whole counsel of God”
- **Luke 18:22** – “You lack one thing...”

All denominations teach some truth

- **James 2:10** – to stumble in one point is to be guilty of breaking law (God's laws here).
- **Psalm 119:160**, *The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.*
- We must respect what God teaches in all matters.
- Is not such an acknowledgement saying that what some are teaching may not be the truth?

Cf. Matthew 15:9

There are saved people in all churches

- To determine this, we must understand HOW one is saved.
- There is only ONE plan of salvation – **John 14:6, Ephesians 4:4-5, etc.**
 - Hearing – **Romans 10:17**
 - Belief – **John 8:24, Romans 10:9-10**
 - Repentance – **Acts 2:38, 17:30**
 - Confession – **Romans 10:9-10**
 - Baptism – **Acts 2:38, 22:16, Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:3-4, 1 Peter 3:20-21, etc.**
- Yet most denominations follow a different plan - “only believe” (i.e., baptism is not essential to salvation).

There are saved people in all churches

- IF a church teaches false doctrine concerning salvation – how will there be saved people in that church?
- Is it acceptable to fellowship a church that teaches false doctrine? **Cf. Revelation 2:14-15, 18-20.**
- EVEN if the statement were true (it is not), it is not justification for denominations.

One church is as good as another

- This is a culmination of the things we have addressed. It is based on the assumption that what one teaches and practices is as good as what someone else teaches, even if it is different or contradictory.
- BUT, Jesus built 1 church – **Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 1:22-23**. He paid for it with His blood – **Acts 20:28**

One church is as good as another

- What makes it HIS church is the pattern He has established for her.
- **Ephesians 3:10-11** – it was part of God's eternal purpose and a manifestation of His wisdom.
- That includes the local church!
- **1 Corinthians 14:33** – He is not the author of confusion. **1 Cor. 1:10, 13** – HE is NOT divided?
- God wants TRUE unity – **John 17:20-21**, **Ephesians 4:1-3**.
- IF a church is teaching, practicing or tolerating error, it is NOT acceptable to Him!
- This makes finding a church more about what YOU want than what Christ wants!

Concluding thoughts.

- My point in this lesson is not to demean or personally attack those in denominations. Nor am I questioning the sincerity of some within these groups.
- It is presented with the encouragement that we **THINK!**
- BUT what we believe and how is important. Error is to be challenged and exposed, or it will take further root – **Ephesians 5:11**
- Instead of seeking “the church of your choice” , let us seek “the church of Christ’s choice”
- His choice is found in His word.

Are you a part of the
church of Christ?