

Sunday, August 16, 2026 pm

Answering The Justification for Denominations

This morning as part of our 2026 theme, I addressed how God has not joined together denominations. Our point was to emphasize that denominationalism was not part of the pattern in scripture for local churches, and to show some of the problems with that concept of the church that belongs to Christ.

However, there are many who in defense of denominations will seek to justify it with various arguments. In my lesson tonight, building upon this morning's lesson I want to address some arguments some might make in defense of the denominational concept of the church.

NOTE: NOT all who defend denominations would justify it with all the arguments we will address, but they have been used by some. Furthermore, most sources will acknowledge that during Bible times, there were no denominations, but things have changed now. NOTE: That one observation ought to be the catalyst that says denominations are not Biblical or good.

I. John 15:1-8 – Vines and branches

- a. Some advocate that when Jesus was teaching about being the true Vine and they were the branches, that the various branches could be descriptive of the different denominations. Therefore, as long as we are "in the vine", which denomination you are a part of does not matter.
- b. Considering the context will answer this. Jesus is speaking to His apostles, as individuals. That is the context of that occasion (John 13-16).
- c. His subject had to do with growth and was based on abiding "in Him" and NOT depending on yourself.
- d. Furthermore, were the disciples UNITED in their message? Consider Acts 2:1, they were all in one accord in one place. Were they teaching different messages on that day? Certainly not. The whole premise of the NT being written by various authors (including Matthew, Peter, John, etc.) is together they present a completely united message. Even Paul, when he went to the Gentiles, made his case based on delivering to them the SAME gospel and when they heard it, they accepted it (Galatians 2:8-9). Peter would defend the writings of Paul in 2 Peter 3:16.
- e. Furthermore, the premise of what Jesus was teaching was about producing fruit in the Vine. Question: Were the various branches producing the same fruit or different fruits?
- f. Also, the fruit they produced was based upon abiding in Him. As we noted in our lesson this morning, the reason there are various denominations is because of the doctrines and teachings of men. These divide us rather than uniting us.

II. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 – Christ is the head of the church and the body consists of various denominations.

- a. This is a similar argument to the vines and branches.
- b. But in this case it is noted that Christ is the head of the church, and the church is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23). Since different body parts have different functions, it could be describing the different denominations working in tandem to help the body function.
- c. BUT again, context defeats that argument. Paul is dealing with individual members (I believe "Of the church of God which is at Corinth" – 1 Cor. 1:2). They were divided among themselves and Paul said that was NOT acceptable. He wanted them to overcome their differences and "speak the same thing" so that there would be no divisions among them (1 Corinthians 1:10).
- d. By definition denominations teach different things, do different things and are organized differently. IF the definition of the body was different denominations, then consider how the body parts would be going in different directions. But isn't that the VERY THING Paul said was NOT to happen (He spoke

of body parts declaring independence – which is what different teachings is doing) and the result was schism (a tear cause by opposing factions).

- e. Finally, note vs. 27, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” Paul is advocating for COMPLETE unity, NOT: Let’s just agree to disagree. WHICH brings me to my next point.

III. **As long as we agree on key concepts, the rest is left up to our interpretation.**

- a. The justification some make for denominations is to declare that there is a set of core values that must be accepted, but everything else is left to one’s discretion. One site presented 8 foundational doctrines of faith – The Bible is inspired, Who God is, that Jesus came in human form, The Holy Spirit is God, People are unique beings (created, not evolved), Salvation is the result of Jesus on the cross, the church is His body, and belief in God’s final judgment. Various sources list these things differently, adding some, combining some, or subtracting some of these. The point is: To be accepted there is a set of core values that we must agree on to be considered in Christ.
- b. The argument is made that as long as we agree on these things, we may disagree on other things and yet still be in fellowship with one another. Things that are relegated to this list include the organization of the church, the day of worship (Saturday vs. Sunday), who should be baptized and when (except when you say it is necessary for the remission of sins), original sin, election, the work of the Holy Spirit, miracles today, eternal security, what will happen when Christ returns, etc. These are the types of teachings that have produced denominations (AND the interdenominational community church).
- c. BUT – WHY are only certain doctrines necessary, while others are not? AND who gets to decide which doctrines belong where?
- d. The Bible emphasizes complete obedience – Matthew 7:21-23 – it is not enough to say Lord, Lord. You must do His will.
- e. Ephesians 4:4-6 describes unity that goes beyond the defined core values. While some are listed (One Spirit, Lord and God, One hope), the other 3 are open to interpretation (one body – different churches, one faith – beliefs, one baptism – differences in baptism).
- f. 1 Corinthians 4:16-17– note that Paul did not preach a different gospel at different places. He taught the same thing, ‘everywhere in every church’.
- g. Again, note Galatians 1:8-9 – if one teaches a different gospel he is to be accursed.
- h. We must respect what God teaches in all matters.

IV. **“All denominations teach some truth”**

- a. I believe that to be a true statement. AND as you examine the denominational world, you will find many denominations that hold to MOST of the truth – especially morally. BUT is that enough?
- b. Can an atheist or a humanist teach and hold to moral truths? What about a Muslim or Hindu? I believe that many do hold to high moral standards.
- c. Is it ok to accept SOME truth and not accept other truths?
- d. Acts 20:27 – Paul taught the whole counsel of God. Romans 15:19, “*I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.*”
- e. Luke 18:22, as Jesus taught the rich, young ruler He said, “You lack one thing...”
- f. James 2:10 warns that if you keep the whole law and stumble in one point, you are guilty...
- g. Psalm 119:160, *The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.*
- h. Consider also that if one says this, there is an acknowledgment that what some are teaching may not be the truth. Matthew 15:9 – Jesus warned that when we teach the doctrines of men, it is vain worship.

V. **“There are saved people in all churches”**

- a. To understand this we must determine HOW one is saved. Scripture is clear that there is ONLY 1 plan of salvation. God’s plan! (John 14:6, Ephesians 4:4-5, etc.). Most of our religious friends follow a different plan – e.g., faith only (baptism is unnecessary).

- b. When a church teaches a false plan of salvation – how will there be saved people in that church? Is it acceptable to fellowship in a church that is teaching error and ignore it? Revelation 2:14-16 – Pergamos, Rev. 2:18-20 – Thyatira had those practicing and teaching false doctrine. It mattered!
- c. Further, even if the statement were true (I say it is not), it still does not justify denominationalism. Instead, it makes finding a faithful church irrelevant, unnecessary and optional.

VI. “One church is as good as another”

- a. This is culmination of many of the points I have addressed in this lesson. And it is based on the assumption that what one teaches as practices is as good as what others are teaching on those subjects, even if it is different. BUT the real question that we should ask is: What is the standard that you are basing that claim upon?
- b. BUT let us not forget that Jesus only built 1 church – Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 1:22-23 – it is His body. And He paid for it with His blood – Acts 20:28.
- c. What makes it His church is the pattern He has established by His teachings, example and through His apostles. Note Ephesians 3:10-11 – the church was a part of God’s eternal purpose and a manifestation of His wisdom. We dare not seek to change ANYTHING He has established about His church.
- d. 1 Corinthians 14:33 – He is not the author of confusion. 1 Corinthians 1:10 – He is not (to be) divided.
- e. God wants true unity – John 17:20-21, Ephesians 4:1-3 – we need to be working toward that end.
- f. IF there are churches preaching, practicing and tolerating error, then they are NOT acceptable to Him.
- g. And as we noted this morning, it can make finding a church more about what YOU want than what Christ wants.

The point of this lesson is not to demean or personally attack those who are in a denomination or defending it. I believe the Bible clearly teaches they are wrong and thus NOT what God intended for His church to be. Our purpose is to show WHY it is wrong and attempts to justify the denominational concept are false.

As we noted this morning, instead of seeking to find the “church of your choice”, let us seek to find the church of Christ’s choice. And the only way you can do that is by opening your Bible and honestly examining what His word tells you His church is about. We are trying to be that church in everything that we do. It is not popular, but our goal to please God and the only way we can do that is by respecting His will in all that do and teach.

What about you? Are you a part of the church of Christ? Think about it!