

Sunday, March 16, 2026 am

What God Has NOT Joined Together (4) Denominationalism

Today, we continue our theme for 2026. We have begun examining some things God has NOT joined together, even though many think they are acceptable to God. Last week we discussed fellowship with unbelievers. Today, we want to address the concept of denominationalism.

NOTE: I realize this is not a comfortable subject because of some of its implications, especially with our friends and loved ones. But it is a Biblical subject that is misunderstood by far too many in our religious society, even among Christ believers. However, we will see that the concept of denominationalism is unbiblical in many ways.

I. What is denominationalism?

- a. **Denomination**¹ – 1. A large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name, usually organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy. 2. One of a series of kinds, values, or sizes, as in a system of currency or weights. 3. A name or designation, especially for a class or group. 8. A class, or society of individuals, called by the same name; a sect; as a religious denomination.
- b. **Religiously** it is a group of congregations that join themselves together under some earthly hierarchy. Member congregations subscribe to the beliefs and teachings of the organization.
- c. **Denominationalism** – the tendency to separate into denominations and to advocate for such as acceptable. It is the belief that the body of Christ consists of many denominations, that may teach differently concerning doctrine, authority and organization, yet they are all still the body of Christ.

II. Why is denominationalism wrong?

- a. It is divisive –
 - i. The word **denominate** actually means to name something (designate), but in practice it means to divide something into parts. Take US currency as an example. The various forms of currency are describes as denominations. 100 pennies equals \$1. 4 quarters also equals \$1 but it is a different denomination. 100 dollar bills equals \$100. So does 5 - \$20, or 10 - \$10. They are all different denominations of US currency. And given a specific amount together (such as \$100), any combination of different denominations that equals that amount would constitute the whole.
 - ii. Some advocate that the body of Christ can divided similar to different denominations of currency and together they make up the whole of the body of Christ. Take for example 4 different denominations: Baptist would be 25%, Methodist would be 25%, Catholic would be 40% and Lutherans would be 10% (NOTE: These numbers are inaccurate, this is just illustration – TT). But together they comprise 100% of the body of Christ.
 - iii. But what makes them different? It is what they teach, how they are organized and how they identify themselves. They are NOT in agreement with each other oftentimes on very fundamental Biblical teachings.
 - iv. The problem with this is that we do not find this arrangement in scripture. The Bible is clear that dividing or splintering is contrary to scripture.
 1. 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 is the closest equivalent to this where Paul was clear, “let there be no divisions among you.” Yet they splintered and called themselves the body of Christ. Paul said, NO!

¹ Denomination, Cited 8/14/2026; The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5th edition. ©2026, by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

2. Ephesians 2:14-16 – Christ died to break down the wall of separation.
Denominationalism either builds walls or ignores the division.

b. ***It is unbiblical*** – Why is denominationalism divisive?

- i. Because it is contrary to the NT pattern for the church. WE have addressed what the church is. It is the body of the saved (those called out of the world). The term is used in only 2 senses in the NT: Universal – all who are saved & local – a group of the saved who join themselves together in a given location to do the work God has given us to do collectively (worship Him, evangelize, build each other up and help each other physically as we can).
- ii. A study of NT churches (local) finds that each one acted independently and autonomously of others. They were self-governing and not joined to some earthly organization that was larger than a local church. Denominationalism challenges this autonomy by creating an organization larger than a local church. This larger organization give direction to all local churches that are a part of it (but has no authority over other denominational organizations). This is where creed books comes from (e.g., the Methodist discipline, the Lutheran catechisms, The Episcopalian Book of Common Prayer, The Vatican, etc.).
- iii. John 17:20-21 – as Jesus prayed, His desire was that all men be one (united). He declares that it was to the degree that He and the Father were united.
- iv. Ephesians 4:1-6 notes that we are to be endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. He goes on to describe the depth of that unity with 7 “ones”.
- v. 1 Corinthians 4:17 – Paul taught the same thing everywhere that he went.
- vi. Does the pattern found in the NT for the church matter? Yes.
 1. Patterns have always been important to God. God gave Noah a pattern for building the ark – Genesis 6:14-16.
 2. Consider the instructions given for the tabernacle and priesthood in Exodus. God was very specific. Exodus 25:9.
 3. Recall that Jesus said in Matthew 16:18-19 that He would build HIS church.
 4. When you study the NT you will see what the purpose of the church is, how we are organized, how to properly worship God, what the terms of admission are (a single plan of salvation), how we identify ourselves, etc. These things matter.

c. ***It is a product of men***

- i. If God has given us a pattern, why is there so much division and difference in the way denominations conduct themselves? It is because Denominations are the product of men.
- ii. God has never been pleased with the religions of men. Exodus 32:1-10 describes the golden calf while Moses was on Mt. Sinai speaking directly to YHWH. 1 Kings 12:26-33 – Jeroboam, after God gave him to be king over most of Israel, he built a brand new religion. Whether they were worshipping YHWH or not, it was NOT God’s pattern. These are examples of the product of man. Was God pleased?
- iii. Galatians 1:6-9 declares plainly there is one gospel. To preach “another gospel is to be accursed.”
- iv. 2 John 9-11 – if anyone does not abide in the doctrine of Christ.
- v. Consider also the multiple warnings against false teachers – 2 Peter 2:1-3, Jude, Acts 20:28-31 where Paul warned the elders of Ephesus about wolves in their midst.
- vi. Every denomination can trace its origin back to a man. And while many of them were well intentioned (and did NOT want to amass a following), they veered from God’s pattern, or did not go far enough in restoring the pattern of the NT church.

d. ***It implies we cannot understand God’s pattern and will***

- i. We have established that God has given us a pattern for His church and worshipping Him.
- ii. But often man will declare that we cannot understand what God wants us to do.

- iii. How many look at the religious division of professed followers of scripture, and declare there is no way to know what is actually true? This prompts many to not search very hard to find answers.
- iv. 1 Corinthians 14:33 – God is not the author of confusion.
- v. Ephesians 5:17 commands us to understand the will of the Lord.
- vi. Also, Ephesians 3:3-4 notes that Paul wrote as He did so that we can understand.
- vii. So why is there so much confusion and ignorance to the truth? The simple answer is often that man is willing to work hard enough to find the true answer – 2 Peter 1:3, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2:15.
- viii. Acts 17:30-31 warns us that a day is coming when we will stand before Him in judgment. And ignorance will NOT be an excuse?

e. *IT makes the church about what we want rather than what God wants*

- i. Denominationalism is man centered. Have you heard anyone say, “Find the church of your choice”. Or, “get into a Bible believing church” (without specifying), etc.
- ii. What is wrong with this? It often makes the church about what we want MORE than what God wants. Consider that man may be seeking a church based upon his wants. He keeps searching until he finds one that allows him to do what he wants. That is NOT how one will find the true church.
- iii. Man often looks to what makes him feel good – which is emotionally driven. And such is a subjective faith. He seeks approval for his lifestyle, even if God’s word does not.
- iv. When you study the religion of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12) it was a religion of convenience and man made innovations.
- v. But consider scripture – Proverbs 14:12, *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*
- vi. Isaiah 55:8-9, *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.”*
- vii. Romans 10:1-3 finds Paul grieving, Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. *For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.*
- viii. Consider where we are today because of ecumenicalism (the belief that says we should accept and be closer to those who teach differently). As we have recently noted, change in pattern and tolerance almost always leads to more progressive attitudes in time. When you move closer to or change the line between right and wrong, the next generation will likely move it farther left (more progressive). Look at what some of the mainstream denominations advocate today that would have NEVER been tolerated a few decades ago (same-sex marriage, the roles of women in leadership, defending law breakers and various immoral behaviors, etc.). And the churches that take a more stern stand are growing smaller and weaker.

It is my hope that in this lesson we have seen that denominationalism is not something that God approves of. Another point to be made is that history is clear that this concept of faith was NOT present in the first century when scripture was written. This concept did not develop until 100s of years later. God has NOT joined the various denominations together.

So if you are looking for a church to be part of. Let me encourage you to avoid the denominational concept of the church. Instead of seeking “the church of your choice”, why not see the “church of Christ’s choice”? Think about it!