

Thus, denominations follow the doctrines of men, human opinions, rather than the Word of God. We must neither add to nor subtract from the Bible as the authoritative guide for God's people (Revelation 22:18-19). The only creed we may accept is the Bible.

The Bible only and only the Bible produces Christians only and only Christians. One will simply harvest Christians (Acts 11:26) if he teaches only the word of God, the "incorruptible" seed (1 Peter 1:23). The seed of the kingdom will no more produce the various denominations than seed corn will produce soy beans. Both in the natural and spiritual realms, each seed produces after its own kind (Genesis 1:11-12; 1 Peter 1:22-23; 4:16). The church Jesus built has no human creed.

Furthermore, we must not be guilty of sectarian loyalty as reflected by party names (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). As individuals, we may be called "believers" (Acts 5:14), "disciples" (Acts 9:1), "saints" (Acts 9:13), "Christians" (Acts 11:25-26) or "members" (1 Corinthians 12:27). As a group, whether local or universal, we may be called "the church" (Acts 8:3), "the Way" (Acts 9:1-2), the church of Christ (Romans 16:16), "the church of God" (1 Corinthians 1:2), "the church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:14-15), or "the general assembly and church of the firstborn" (Hebrews 12:22-23). All these names are used to include all scripturally baptized believers in their relationship to Christ and God.

If we have loyalty to a religious party, a group larger than a local church and smaller than the universal body of the saved, we are denominational. This party loyalty is reflected by party names. Sectarian names include the various denominational names (Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, etc.) but also names of less formal parties (Conservative, Liberal, etc.). We can also show sectarianism by insisting on only one divinely authorized name for God's people, whether as individuals or as a group, to the exclusion of others. Those who claimed, "I am of Christ," were also a party (1 Corinthians 1:12).

The church the Lord built has no human creed and no sectarian name. It is neither a denomination nor is it composed of denominations.

Body of Christ

The inspired apostle Paul described the church in its relationship to Christ as "His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). The church of Christ is the spiritual body of Christ, and Christ is the spiritual Head of His church. Just as Christ is the Christian's fullness, the One who supplies all our spiritual needs (Colossians 1:19; 2:8-10), even so the church is the fullness of Christ. Anyone in Christ is in His church, and anyone in His church is in Christ. Any blessing in Christ, and all spiritual blessings are in Him (Ephesians 1:3), is in His church. One

can no more be in Christ and not be in His church than he could be in a bath tub full of water and not be in the water.

How many bodies does the Lord have? Paul affirms, "There is one body" (Ephesians 4:4). If there is one body, and the body is the church, how many churches does Jesus have?

Since the church is the fullness of Christ, and salvation is in Him (2 Timothy 2:10), all saved people are members of this church. But, someone objects, "You believe the Church of Christ is what saves!" No, Christ is the only Savior (John 14:6). But whom does Jesus Christ save? "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body" (Ephesians 5:23). The Lord saves His body, the church. The church is the saved, not the savior.

Another protests, "So you believe I have to join the Church of Christ to be saved!" No, one cannot join the church Jesus built. The Lord adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47).

This does not mean that the church is some exclusive club that only lets select people in. We invite all to come to Christ and be saved (Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:17). It just means the church of the New Testament is nondenominational. Denominations have man made membership requirements, and men determine who may join. But the church of God is composed of all who have accepted Christ by the obedience of faith and have been saved by the gospel (Romans 1:5,16-17). No man or group of men determine its membership. There is no official roll of members on earth. The Lord adds people to His church, the body of the saved, as He saves them, and their names are enrolled in heaven (Luke 10:20; Revelation 20:15).

Definition of Church

The church Jesus built, then, is simply **the assembly of people called out of the world into fellowship with God.** The church is the spiritual assembly of God's people (Hebrews 12:23), composed of those who have responded to the gospel call (2 Thessalonians 2:14), have forsaken the fellowship of the world and its sin (2 Corinthians 6:17-18), and have been brought into fellowship with God (1 John 1:3,7).

Conclusion

I do not ask anyone to join a denomination, accept a human creed, or wear a sectarian name. I plead with people to avoid all these sinful practices. I simply implore all people to believe and obey the gospel, that the Lord might add them to His body, the church, for only in Christ, in His body, the church, is salvation found. Have you done this? If not, why not?

Questions for Review

I. Matching

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| 1. _____ Denomination | A. a brief authoritative doctrinal formula |
| 2. _____ Sect | B. a religious body with a sectarian name, human creed, and organization tying local churches together |
| 3. _____ Creed | C. religious faction |

II. True/False

1. _____ Denominations have creeds written by uninspired men.
2. _____ The church Jesus built is a sect.
3. _____ The church Jesus built is composed of the various denominations.
4. _____ The only creed of the church Jesus built is the Bible.
5. _____ The church of the New Testament has a party name.
6. _____ It is proper to call the church “the church of God.”
7. _____ It is proper to call the church “the church of Christ.”
8. _____ Members of the church may be called “saints.”
9. _____ Members of the church may be called “Christians.”
10. _____ The Lord approves Christians wearing sectarian names.
11. _____ A congregation may have a scriptural name and still be wrong.
12. _____ The church of the New Testament is a denomination.
13. _____ The church is the body of Christ.
14. _____ Christ has many bodies.
15. _____ The church is composed of all people whom Christ has saved.
16. _____ God adds the saved to His church.
17. _____ The church is the assembly of people called out of the world into fellowship with God.

Bible Correspondence Course

Lesson Eleven

The Church Jesus Built

Introduction

When people ask me what I am religiously, I usually reply, “I’m just a Christian; I’m not a member of any denomination.” Some think I mean I am not a member of any church. But I am a member of the church Jesus built (Matthew 16:13-18). Well, isn’t that the denomination I belong to? What is the church Jesus built?

Neither a Denomination nor Composed of Denominations

The word “denomination” is not found in the Bible. However, the New Testament mentions denominations a number of times under a different name. The Jews in the days of the Lord and His apostles were divided into “sects” (Acts 5:17; 15:5). A “sect” is “a division or group based upon different doctrinal opinions and/or loyalties.” (Louw & Nida. 11.50) The sects of the Jews wore party names as a show of sectarian loyalty (Acts 23:6-8). Both the Pharisees and Sadducees bound doctrines unknown to the Scriptures as tests of membership in their sects (Matthew 15:1-9; Acts 23:8). They even considered Christians a sect of Judaism (Acts 24:5; 28:22) and derisively called them “Nazarenes.” (Acts 24:5) Paul implied Christians were not a sect (Acts 24:14).

The same Greek word rendered “sect” is also translated “factions” (1 Corinthians 11:19) and “heresies” (Galatians 5:20; 2 Peter 2:1). The word primarily means

a choosing, choice...; then, that which is chosen, and hence, an opinion, especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects.... (Vine. 2:217).

Everyone has opinions, things he thinks are true but cannot prove by the Bible. If he treats his opinions as if they were divine revelation, by teaching them as divine truth and/or insisting that others follow them, he becomes an heretic (Titus 3:10-11, **King James Version**) or “divisive man” (**New King James Version**), and must be rejected (Ibid). Heresies (sectarianism) is a work of the flesh that will keep one from inheriting the kingdom of heaven (Galatians 5:19-21).

The various denominations have creeds developed by uninspired men. A “creed” is “a brief authoritative doctrinal formula ... intended to define what is held by a Christian congregation, synod, or church to be true and essential and exclude what is held to be false belief.” (Webster. 533)