
WHAT DENOMINATION ARE WE?

ELLIOTTSVILLE CHURCH OF CHRIST • FEBRUARY 12, 2012

Introduction:

“What denomination is your church?”

Discussion:

I. What is a denomination?

- A. “Denominations are associations of congregations—Though sometimes it might be said that congregations are localized subdivisions of denominations—that have a common heritage. Moreover, a true denomination does not claim to be the only legitimate expression of the church” (Donald G. Tinder, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1984, p. 310).

“Denominationalism – A term for the continuation of the organizations and emphasis on the divisions and distinctions of Protestantism” (Donald T. Kauffman, *The Dictionary of Religious Terms*, 1967, p 147).

- B. Note what a denomination is. A denomination is a collectivity of local churches. It is bigger than a local church. It is smaller than the universal church. Further, a denomination, by its very nature, is an emphasis of division.

II. What are the earmarks of a denomination?

- A. “A large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy.”
- B. Creedal or faith statement in addition to the Bible.
1. **I Timothy 3:15; I Corinthians 4:17**, Paul indicated he taught the same thing in every local congregation. Yet, look around, there is no unity, there is division. How are the divisions maintained?
 2. It began back in the 4th century when Constantine called the Nicene Council. When they wrote the Nicene Creed to define exactly how Jesus’ divinity worked, they took a step away from the Bible. From that point on, it was not enough to agree with inspired scripture. One also had to agree with an approved creedal statement
 3. To be a part of the denominational organization, one must believe the Bible in accord with the denomination’s agreed and voted upon doctrine.
- C. Organization and official hierarchy beyond the local congregation
1. Most denominations began as a single congregation.
 2. As more congregations are established under the mother congregation, an official hierarchy is developed.
- D. Name to distinguish from other denominations
1. Denominations develop a name in order to distinguish themselves from the other denominations.

2. Having said that, a relatively recent phenomenon is that of denominational churches not using their denomination's name.

III. What do we find in the Bible?

- A. In the Bible, we do not find any of the issues discussed in the above definitions or earmarks.
- B. We find the universal church, the collection of all Christians, of all locales, of all times. Jesus spoke of this in **Matthew 16:18**. We find local congregations, groups of Christians within a given geographical locale who assemble together regularly under a common oversight—see **Romans 16:16; Galatians 1:2**.
- C. In the New Testament, we see no creedal statements besides the scriptures. **II Tim 3:16-17**.
- D. In the New Testament, we see no organization beyond the local congregation except Jesus Himself as the head. **Acts 14:23, I Peter 5:1-4**
- E. The New Testament offers several names or descriptions of the church.
 1. **Romans 16:16**, Paul referred to multiple local congregations as “the churches of Christ.”
 2. **I Corinthians 1:2** and **II Corinthians 1:1**, “the church of God which is at Corinth.”
 3. **Galatians 1:2**, Paul spoke of “the churches of Galatia.”
 4. **I Thessalonians 1:1** and **II Thessalonians 1:1**, “to the church of the Thessalonians.”
 5. **I Thessalonians 2:14**, “the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea.”
 6. **I Timothy 3:15**, Paul called it “the church of the living God.”
 7. When Paul wrote to Ephesus, Philippi and Colossae, he wrote “to the saints who are at Ephesus” (**Ephesians 1:1**); “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons” (**Philippians 1:1**); and “to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae” (**Colossians 1:2**).
 8. **Acts 24:14**, Paul referred to the church as “the Way.” **Acts 24:22**.
 9. **Hebrews 12:22-24**. We come to “the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.”
 10. Most often, it is just referred to as “the church”—e.g. **Acts 11:26; I Timothy 3:15; Philemon 1:2**, et al.
- F. Having said all of this, what do we find in the New Testament? What denominations do we read about? None. **Acts 2:41; Acts 11:26; Galatians 1:6-9; II John 9**

IV. What about us?

- A. I must address two groups as we answer our initial question. What denomination are we?
- B. To our guests: We are no denomination. Not only are we non-denominational, but not finding the authority for such an organization, we are anti-denominational.
- C. To our members: We must not forget this. We are not a part of “The Church of Christ” Denomination. There are denominations with these kinds of names.

Conclusion:

What denomination are we? No denomination. We are simply Christians who make up a local church that belongs to Christ. We are simply Christians who have been added to the universal body of the saved. We want to be nothing more and nothing less than just generic, Bible Christians. Would you like to be that? Would you like to be just a Christian, nothing more and nothing less? Leave denominational Christianity behind, simply be part of Christ's church. Obey Christ's gospel and God will add you to His church. **Acts 2:47**.