

Is the Church of Christ part of denominational Christianity? Pleasant Plains 1-17-2016AM NICK ANGEL

- ***Read John 17:13-22*** Jesus, in the garden before His betrayal and eventual death, prays here for His disciples. He first prays for those closest to Him, His chosen Apostles, but then He prays for all of His disciples. He prays specifically for them to be united through God's Word. He adds that through their unity they will have the ability to teach the world and bring many more souls into Christ. This was the desire of Jesus even during His most difficult time of trial. Surely it speaks to how much Jesus cares for His people and how much He desires for them to be unity in God's Word.
- Think with me just for a moment about the current state of Christianity. As Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, right now, how do you think He feels about those who profess to carry His name? Do you feel as if His prayer in the garden has come to be true? I just don't think we can say that is the case based upon what we see in the world of Christianity, today. Instead of unity, we see the exact opposite. We see what is referred to as denominationalism. This literally means Christianity broken up into pieces that are different from one another. It is in its simplest description "divided Christianity." Churches within denominationalism look different, believe different, and they act different. That sounds nothing like what Jesus prayed for in the garden. Therefore, in examining myself I must ask the question...is the Church of Christ part of denominational Christianity? Are we adding to the divided nature of Christianity?
- I must ask this because many people believe that to be the case. We would vehemently denounce denominationalism as contrary to God's Will, but then some would say that we would be denouncing ourselves since we are just as much a part of denominationalism as the next church down the street. So, is that true? Are we a church that feeds the big machine that is denominational Christianity? In order to answer this, we must do some comparisons between churches that are a part of denominational Christianity and the Church of Christ. By doing these simply comparisons, I think that the answer to the stated question will become abundantly clear. The first half of this lesson simply details some dominant characteristics of denominational churches. And then we'll consider how the Lord's Church compares to these denominational characteristics.

Comparisons between Denominational Churches and Churches of Christ

I. Characteristics of Denominational Christianity

A. Founded by a man

1. The first thing couple things we want to consider is the beginnings of denominational churches. Who were they founded by?
2. Small sampling of founders for denominational churches:
 - a) Lutheran Church: **Martin Luther**
 - b) Presbyterian church: **John Knox**
 - c) Anglican Church (Known formerly as the Church of England): **King Henry VIII**
 - d) Baptist Church: **John Smythe**
 - e) Quakers: **George Fox**
 - f) Methodist Episcopalian Church: **John & Charles Wesley**
 - g) Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon Church): **Joseph Smith, Jr.**
 - h) 7th Day Adventists Church: **William Miller**

B. Established after New Testament Era

1. Not only is the "Who?" important, but its also important to recognize when these churches were established.
2. Small sampling of founders for denominational churches:
 - a) Lutheran Church: Martin Luther (**around 1521 after excommunication from the Catholic Church**)
 - b) Presbyterian church: John Knox (**1550s**)
 - c) Anglican Church (Known formerly as the Church of England): King Henry VIII (**1530s in England**)
 - d) Baptist Church: John Smythe (**1609 in Holland**)
 - e) Quakers: George Fox (**1684 in England**)
 - f) Methodist Episcopalian Church: John & Charles Wesley (**1784 in America**)
 - g) Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon Church): Joseph Smith, Jr. (**1830 in New York**)
 - h) 7th Day Adventists Church: William Miller (**1845**)

C. Earthly Headquarters

1. Most, if not all, denominations have a central headquarters or base of operations here on earth.
2. Small sampling of some earthly headquarters
 - a) Roman Catholic Church: **The Vatican City, Italy**
 - b) Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: **Salt Lake City, Utah**
 - c) Evangelical Lutheran Church: **Chicago, Illinois**
 - d) Southern Baptist Church: **Nashville, Tennessee**
 - e) Church of God: **Cleveland, Tennessee**
 - f) 7th Day Adventists Church: **Silver Springs, Maryland**
 - g) Jehovah Witnesses: **Brooklyn, New York**

D. Man Organized

1. Another distinguishing characteristic of denominational churches is their organizational structure.
2. A sampling of some ways in which denominational churches are organized:
 - a) Churches are linked together and one person or group leads multiple churches within the denomination.
 - b) Board of Directors, Board of Trustees, Governing Councils, etc.
 - c) Senior Pastor, Church Council, Youth Pastor, Worship Minister, etc.
 - d) Pope, Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Deacons, & Laity
 - e) First Presidency, Quorum of the 12 Apostles, General Officers, Quorum of the 70, Presiding Bishopric, Stake Presidency, Ward Bishopric, Individual Members

E. Man-made creeds, manuals, & conventions are authoritative. Meaning this is how they determine what will be believed and practiced within those churches of the denomination.

1. The final distinguishing mark of denominations is their source of authority.
2. Small sampling of some of the different ways in which denominations establish beliefs and doctrines within their churches:
 - a) Evangelical Lutheran Church: **Church-wide Assembly**
 - b) Southern Baptist Churches: **The Organizational Manual of the Southern Baptists Convention**
 - c) Baptist Churches: **The Hiscox Standard Baptist Manuel**
 - d) Catholic Church: **The Catechism of the Catholic Church**
 - e) Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: **The Book of Mormon, The Pearl of Great Price, Doctrines and Covenants**

II. Characteristics of the Lord's Church

A. Founded by Jesus Christ

1. No mere mortal man was the founder of the church that belongs to Jesus. It was Jesus Himself who said that He would build His church. **(Matt. 16:18)**
2. Jesus shed His blood to establish His church and Kingdom. The church that we belong to is that very church that Jesus gave His life for. He is the Chief Cornerstone that the Apostles laid the foundation of the church upon. No man can claim such a position. **(Eph. 2:19-22)**
3. Some would argue that the Church of Christ was established by someone like Stone or Campbell, but that just isn't true. They were not looking to establish a church, but to restore the very church that we can read of in the New Testament, that Paul speaks of in **Ephesians 2:19-22**.

B. Established on Pentecost

1. It is in **Acts 2** where we read of Jesus's Apostles preaching to the Jews and convicting them concerning the truth of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Many are pricked and ask what they can do **(2:37)**. Peter responds with repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of their sins **(2:38)**, but that is not the only thing that happened. Notice that in **v.47** that people are being added to something. I'll suggest to you that these saved people are being added to the church, thus we must understand that the church was established on that day. **Daniel 2's** prophecy was fulfilled here in **Acts 2**.

2. Not only this, but later on in **Acts 11:15** we find the Apostle Peter retelling his experience with the Gentiles receiving the Gospel and being added to the Body of Christ. As he is retelling he mentions that he recognized what was happening with what happened "at the beginning." What beginning is he referring to? I would suggest that he is referring to the beginning of the Christian age and the church back in **Acts 2**.
 3. Obviously, this local church hasn't existed since "the beginning", but we pledge allegiance to that same universal body that was established on that day. We trace our roots and strive to be exactly what was created on that day nearly 2,000 years ago.
- C. Heavenly Headquarters
1. The head of the church is Jesus Christ (**Col. 1:18**). Therefore, the headquarters of the Church of Christ is in heaven where Jesus is (**Acts 2:33**).
 2. The fact that there is no earthly headquarters for the church is quite shocking to many people, but it makes much more sense when we consider the way that the church is organized.
- D. Biblically Organized
1. Unlike denominational Christianity, the church that Christ established has a very simple organizational setup. Christ is the head and the church is the body. (**Eph. 5:23**)
 2. Local churches are not connected as they are within denominational Christianity. Each individual church is responsible for itself and its work. It has its own leadership (shepherds/elders) and they are responsible only for the local group that they work with. (**I Pet. 5:2**)
- E. New Testament as Only Authority
1. All authority was given to Jesus by the Father in **Matthew 28:18**. He is the ultimate authority for all that is to be done within His church.
 2. Additionally, He gave authority to His Apostles and inspired writers through the Holy Spirit to lead the early church. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they are to keep and hold to the traditions that had been given to them by the Apostles of Jesus. (**II Thess. 2:15**) Everything we do..we do by the authority of Jesus Christ as His church and disciples. (**Col. 3:17**) No man-made creeds or manuals are needed.

III. So is the Church a Christ part of denominational Christianity?

- A. From a purely comparison standpoint, I think the answer of no is very obvious because the two do not even begin to compare when we consider their defining characteristics.
- B. But even beyond that, this church does not add to divided Christianity because we seek to hold only to the Bible as our source of authority. Christianity becomes divided and problems occur when individuals are not willing to simply hold to God's Word as our guide to Christianity. Instead of simply following God, individuals would pursue their own ways and divisions occur.
- C. This was the problem that Paul ran into with the Corinthians in **I Corinthians 1:10-15**. These Christians had gotten carried away with the idea of taking on some other name than simply of Christian. Paul rebukes them for this attitude, and he would rebuke many who claim Christ today for the exact same thing.
- D. May we never contribute to divided Christianity by seeking to hold to something other than the pure word of God and our Lord Jesus.

Have you ever been asked what denomination you belong to? I know I have many times, and I usually don't jump all over the person asking because they don't usually understand the problems with the denominational mindset. But we must recognize that Jesus is not at all pleased with Christianity being so divided. He wants all of His followers to be united and that begins by simply accepting the Bible as our standard of authority. May God help us all to never add to the confusion of denominationalism. May we stand strong and hold to God's Word and the pattern it has laid out for us so that we might be good servants of His Kingdom and that He might be glorified in our unity in His Word.