

THE N.T. CHURCH VS. DENOMINATIONALISM

I. INTRODUCTION

1. All people agree there is such a thing in the religious realm of our world as Denominationalism.
 - a. Not all people believe it is divinely authorized, nor that it has been established by our Lord, but by the will and authority of men rather than God.
 - b. While some do not accept it as divinely acceptable, most religious people do not question its divine right to exist.
 - c. In fact, the latter are shocked to think that anyone would even question that Denominationalism is acceptable to God.
2. On the other hand, there is in existence what is known as the N.T. church, the church we can read about in the N.T., the church belonging to Jesus Christ.
 - a. Of this the Bible attests over and over again in various N.T. passages.
 - b. Many mistakenly believe and teach that what the Scriptures identify as the N.T. church is made up of the various denominations, or, at least, of the faithful of the various denominations.
 - c. However, the Scriptures plainly teach that the N.T. church is not a Denomination, nor is it any part of Denominationalism.
3. Thus our topic: The N.T. Church Vs. Denominationalism.

II. DISCUSSION

A. **FIRST, WE TAKE NOTE OF THE N.T. CHURCH, OR THE CHURCH BELONGING TO JESUS CHRIST AS REVEALED IN THE N.T.**

1. First we study the word “church” as it is used in the N.T.
 - a. The word “church” in the N.T. is translated from the original Greek word “ecclesia.”
 - (1) It’s a word meaning “the called out.”
 - (2) The simple meaning of it is “assembly,” and originally it had no religious significance.
 - (3) Originally, the word was used with reference to any group of people called together for a variety of purposes, good or bad.

- (4) For instance, in Ac.19:21-41, the word “ecclesia” is translated “assembly” and used in reference to a riotous mob assembled to persecute the apostle Paul and his traveling companions in the city of Ephesus – note vv.32,39,41.
- b. In this study we note that the word “church,” which is translated from the Greek word “ecclesia” is also used in the N.T. with a religious significance, which is our primary concern in this lesson.
- (1) When so used it has reference to God’s “called out” people – God’s people called out of the world, separated from the world, by means of the gospel of Christ, 1Pet.2:9 (Deut.14:2; 26:18); 1Cor.6:19,20; 1Pet.1:18,19; 2Th.2:13,14.
- c. When the word “ecclesia” or “church” is used in a religious sense referring to God’s called out people, it is used in two different and distinct ways: the church universal and the local church or congregation.
- (1) The church in the UNIVERSAL sense:
- (a) Is the saved in the aggregate, all those individuals called and saved by the gospel the world over, as in Mt.16:18; Eph.1:22,23; 5:23-27; Col.1:18,24. Cf. Mk.16:15,16; 1Cor.15:1,2.
- (b) Is always used in the singular, just one; never in the plural, as of many. Cf. Mt.16:18.
- (c) Is the body of Christ, the one body of Christ because in this sense there is only one body, Eph.1:22,23; 5:3; 4:4; Col.1:18,24.
- (d) Is never used to mean or to refer to a local church, and certainly not to a group of denominational churches.
- (e) Is made up of saved individuals, all those called and saved by the gospel; it is not made up of churches, either local churches of Christ or denominational

churches; for individuals are the branches in the vine, not churches, Jno.15:1-8; Rom.12:4,5; 1Cor.12:11,13,27.

(1) When one is saved by obeying the gospel, the Lord adds that one to the church universal, the one body of Christ, the one church, Ac.2:36-38,41,47; 1Cor.12:13.

(2) The church does not save; it is the saved.

(f) Is the house of God; God's sons and daughters; his children; the born again in the aggregate, 1Tim.3:14,15; Jno.3:3-5.

(g) Has no earthly organization, no earthly headquarters.

(1) Jesus Christ, who is now in heaven at the right hand of God, from whence he now rules and reigns, is "head over all things to the church," Eph.1:22,23.

(2) The only other officials of the church UNIVERSAL are the apostles of Christ and N.T. prophets, who are no longer in the flesh upon the earth.

(3) We have these today in the same way that the Jews of Jesus' day had Moses and the prophets: through the written word, Lk.16:27-31; 2Tim.3:16,17; Eph.3:1-5; 1Cor.14:37; 1Jno.1:3; 4:6.

(4) The Bible says nothing about and knows nothing about Popes, the College of Cardinals, Archbishops, Presidents, Boards of Directors, Sponsoring Churches, Sponsoring Elderships, or any other universal officers, or centralized, ecumenical movements.

(5) Having no earthly organization, the UNIVERSAL church has no

collective mission or collective work, or collective function, or collective, centralized oversight by any one, any group, or anything.

- (2) The church in the LOCAL sense:
- (a) Refers to the saved or the Christians in a particular place who have joined together to work and worship in service to God in a collective sense; as at:
 - (1) At Jerusalem, Ac.9:26-31.
 - (2) Corinth, 1Cor.1:2.
 - (3) Thessalonica, 1Th.1:1.
 - (4) Griffith Springs.
 - (5) 28th Ave., Pine Bluff.
 - (6) 6th Ave., Pine Bluff.
 - (b) Is often referred to in the plural sense, Ac.9:31; 15:41; Rom.16:16; Gal.1:2,22; Rev.1:4,11.
 - (c) Has organization, Phil.1:1: saints, bishops and deacons.
 - (1) Each local church, wherever located when it has qualified men (not women) is to appoint elders, who oversee and direct the flock of God and its work at that place, Ac.14:23; 20:17,28; 1Th.5:12; Heb.13:17; 1Pet.5:1-3; 1Tim.3:1-7; Tit.1:5-11.
 - (a) This oversight is to be limited to the local church, the flock of God, where they are elders, Ac.20:28; 1Pet.5:2.
 - (b) They cannot by divine right take the oversight of more than one church, or of any part of the work of more than one church.
 - (c) They are overseers in the local church, one local church, never in the universal church, or in a centralized arrangement of churches.

- (2) Each local church, when it has qualified men (not women), is to appoint deacons to serve under its elders, 1Tim.3:8-13.
- (3) Evangelists, or preachers, are proclaimers of God's word in carrying out one phase of the work of the local churches, Eph.4:11,12; 2Tim.4:1-5; Ac.8:5,12; 1Tim.4:11,15,16; 2Tim.2:1,2; Tit.2:15.
 - (a) Preachers are to preach, not oversee the flock.
 - (b) Even though, when qualified, they may be appointed as an elder with the duty of oversight – in my opinion, however, it is better if they do not so serve.
- (d) Has an earthly function, an earthly function as a collectivity; in fact, it has a three-fold mission or a three-fold work of duty.
 - (1) It is to preach the gospel to save the lost (1Tim.3:14,15); this it does by supporting those who preach the gospel (2Cor.11:8).
 - (a) Even elders may be supported when they are required to work full time “in the word and doctrine,” 1Tim.5:17,18.
 - (2) The local church is charged with the duty of edifying the saved, the members who are already Christians, Eph.4:8,11-16; 1Th.5:11; Heb.5:12-14.
 - (a) This is done by means of the word of God, Ac.20:32.
 - (b) Not by parties, church fellow-ship suppers, various types

of games and entertainment under the direction of the local church.

(c) Such things belong to the family not the church.

(3) The local church is to provide benevolent help to needy saints, Ac.2:44,45; 4:34,35; 6:1-4; 1Cor.16:1; Heb.6:10.

(e) Must do its work or fulfill its God-ordained mission (all phases of it) by using the only organization God gave to do it: the local church, Phil.1:1; Eph.4:11-16; Ac.6:1-7; 1Tim.5:16.

(1) In this manner its work was done, and done successively in N.T. days.

(2) It is not authorized to do its work through separate human organization or human institutions. It has no divine authority to do:

(a) Its evangelistic work through a human Evangelistic Society; such as, a Missionary Society.

(b) Its edification work; that is, edifying its members by means of the word, through a human edification society.

(c) Its benevolent work; that is, supplying benevolent needs to needy saints, through a human benevolent society; such as: The Red Cross; A Home such as The Morrilton Orphan Home.

(3) To look for, promote and use what is thought to be an expedient way is to show a lack of faith in God's way. And it is to sin in doing so.

(a) To be expedient, it must first be lawful.

(b) None of those things is lawful.

(4) There is no organization larger than, smaller than, or other than the local church through which the local church is divinely authorized to do any part of its work.

(a) A local church may buy or purchase the services or products of human organizations by means of which to do its work. Examples.

(b) But the local church has no divine authority to organize, build, support or maintain separate human organizations through which or by which it does its work.

(5) Neither does one local church have the divine right to become a Sp. Church, or to work through a Sp. Church arrangement, or any other such centralized arrangement of churches to do its work.

2. We must have divine authority for what we believe, teach and practice, either as individual Christians or as local churches, with no additions thereto, no subtractions from, or substitutions for what is divinely authorized, with all believing, speaking and practicing the same things, Jno.17:20,21; 1Cor.1:10-13; 4:6; 1Pet.4:11; 1Tim.5:16; 2Jno.9; Rev.22:18,19; Mt.7:21-23; See Phil.4:9; 1Cor.11:1; 14:37.

B. NOW WE TAKE NOTE OF DENOMINATIONALISM AS WE KNOW IT TO BE, AND OF THE FACT THAT AS SUCH IT DISPUTES AND CONTRADICTS ALMOST EVERY POINT WE HAVE ESTABLISHED ABOUT THE N.T. CHURCH FROM THE SCRIPTURES.

1. Denominationalism has many different “faiths” (i.e.: the Baptist faith; the Methodist faith; the Lutheran faith, et al), while the Bible says there is “one faith,” Eph.4:5.
2. Denominationalism believes the church we read about in the N.T. is made up of the various denominational churches, instead of every individual who has been baptized into Christ by obeying the gospel, Mk.16:15,16; Ac.2:36-38,41,47; Gal.3:26,27; Rom.6:3-6.
3. Denominationalism believes that the various denominational churches are the branches of the one true N.T. church, rather than individual saints being branches in the true vine, Jno.15:1-8.
4. Denominational Associations, Synods, Conventions, Missionary, Edification and Benevolent Societies, and even the human institutions organized, built and maintained among the digressing churches of Christ are nothing more than human attempts to organize or to activate the church universal, something God did not choose to do, nor authorize any man or group of men to do.
5. The denominational presidents and directors of such Associations, Synods, Conventions and Societies, as well as the church of Christ elders (Sp. Elderships) overseeing more than one local church, or any part of the work of more than one church, are no more Scriptural than the Pope and the College of Cardinals in Rome!
6. Denominationalism in general has a “live and let live” attitude and practice concerning various practices and false teaching, contrary to the word of God. Cf. Eph.5:11; 1Cor.4:6; 1Pet.4:11; Mt.7:21-23; Lk.6:46.
7. Denominationalism offers false worship and false hope to its adherents, Mt.15:9,13,14; Col.2:20-23; Jas.2:24; 2Jno.9.
8. Denominationalism in all its manifestation:
 - a. Is the very opposite of the unity for which Jesus prayed, Jno.17:20,21.
 - b. Is the very essence of the division which the Lord condemned, 1Cor.1:10-13; 4:6.
 - c. Is sinful from beginning to end!

III. CONCLUSION

1. The N.T. church, the Lord's church, the church of Christ, is not a denomination in any sense of the word, although some liberal, digressing churches of Christ are very quickly moving in that direction.
2. Some churches of Christ have already drifted over the waterfall of apostasy and crashed onto the denominational rocks below.
3. Others are either drifting along on that path or are rushing headlong in that direction by the year or even by the day.
4. The big-name churches of Christ with big reputations for doing big things in big ways need to heed the warning of Revelation:
 - a. To the church in Sardis, Rev.3:1-3.
 - b. To the church in Laodicia, Rev.3:14-19.
5. Brethren, let us make sure we are diligent in our continuing effort to believe, teach and practice book, chapter and verse in all things; do Bible things in Bible ways; call Bible things by Bible names, and make such at all times that we are genuinely committed to the restoration of N.T. Christianity, and always resist the call to the return to the Egyptian-like bondage of Denominationalism.