

# The Lord's Church – Not a Denomination

## Introduction

1. **It takes various denominations of coin to equal one dollar.**
  - A. **The word “denomination” signifies a division or segment. In the religious sense, a sect or a party.**
2. **A religious denomination is larger than any local church, but smaller than the redeemed as a whole. Yet, the New Testament speaks only of local congregations.**

1 Corinthians 1:2 To **the church of God which is at Corinth**, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

- A. **It also speaks of the church which embraces all of the saved.**

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things **to the church, which is His body**, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

3. **We learn that the New Testament church cannot be fitted into any denominational mold.**

## **The Church of Christ is the New Testament Church of the First Century**

- 1. The church of Christ is not a Jewish synagogue.**
  - A. The Old Testament, the foundation of Judaism, has been done away with**  
**Colossians 2:14, 17**
  
- 2. The church of Christ is not a Protestant denomination.**
  - A. All the denominations of our day were established by men, hundreds of years after the church of our Lord was established on Pentecost, A.D. 33.**  
**Acts 2:1-4, 47**
    - 1) Denominational earmarks are absent in the church of Christ:**
      - a) prayer altars, voting on baptismal candidates, mechanical instruments of music in worship, universal and territorial organizations, etc.**
  
- 3. The church of Christ is not the Catholic Church.**
  - A. The Roman Catholic church did not come into existence in a full grown state until 606 A.D., nearly 600 years after the Lord's church was established in 33 A.D.**
    - 1) The cardinal doctrines of Catholicism are not in harmony with biblical teaching as we will observe.**

#### **4. The church defined:**

**A. The word “church” means “the called out.”**

**B. The church is that body of people who have been called out of the world by the gospel by obedience to it.**

2 Thessalonians 2:14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

**C. The Bible teaches that Christ rules as the singular head of the church.**

Colossians 1:18 And **He is the head of the body, the church**, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be **head over all things to the church, which is His body**, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

## **5. The church is singular in number. The church is the one fold.**

John 10:16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and **there will be one flock and one shepherd.**

Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd **the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**

### **A. We have learned that the church and the body are the same in Ephesians 1:22-23. There is only one body.**

Ephesians 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;

## **6. We can clearly see that the church of Christ is that one, true New Testament church which existed in the first century.**

### **A. This can be seen by the fact that it possesses the same identifying features.**

## The First Century Church

1. **Designations:** church of Christ (Rom 16:16), church of God (1 Cor 1:2), church of the Lord (Acts 20:28)
2. **Organization:** elders, deacons, evangelists and members in the local congregation (Phil 1:1)
3. **Worship:** met on the first day of each week (1 Cor 16:2), and engaged in acapella singing, praying, teaching, the Lord's supper and giving (Acts 2:42, 47; 1 Cor 14:15; 16:2; Acts 20:7)
4. **Guide:** the apostles' doctrine was their sole rule of faith and practice (Acts 2:42; Gal 1:6-9; Rev 22:19)
5. **Terms of entrance:** believed, repented, confessed Christ, and were baptized (Acts 8:26-40)
6. **Mission:** to support the truth (1 Timothy 3:15)

## The Church of Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

1. The church of Christ is designated as just that, the church of Christ, etc.
2. The church of Christ is organized with elders, deacons, evangelists, members
3. The church of Christ meets upon the first day of each week and engages in acapella singing, praying, teaching, the Lord's supper, and giving
4. The church of Christ is guided solely by the apostles' doctrine, the New Testament
5. The church of Christ is entered by people believing, repenting, confessing and being baptized
6. The church of Christ engages in the support of the truth

**Note:** We should understand that a thing is composed of the sum of its parts. Accordingly, it can be seen that the church of Christ is not one among the many; but, rather, it is the one, true New Testament church.

## **Our Lord Was Udenominational So Must His Church Be**

**1. Jesus did not align himself with any party or division during his time on earth.**

**A. Four principle divisions existed among the Jews:**

**1) Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Essenes.**

**a) Though each of these advocated some truth, our Lord identified himself with none of them. This is significant.**

**B. Jesus prayed for unity, the opposite of denominationalism.**

John 17:20-21 I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; **that they all may be one**, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

**C. Jesus paid for unity – the opposite of denominationalism.**

Ephesians 2:16 and that He might **reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross**, thereby putting to death the enmity.

**D. Jesus pleaded for unity - the opposite of denominationalism.**

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

**E. Jesus planned for unity - the opposite of denominationalism.**

**Ephesians 4:1-6**

- 2. We can see that Jesus was undenominational and anti-denominational. Therefore, His church must be the same.**

## A Two-Fold Contrast

### The Church of the New Testament

1. Divine in origin  
(Matt 16:18; Dan 2:44)
2. Will last forever  
(Dan 2:44; Heb 12:28-29)
3. Designated by Bible names  
(Rom 16:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 1:2)
4. First century in origin (Acts 2:47)
5. Heavenly headquarters  
(Eph 1:22-23; 1 Pet 3:22)
6. Bible only (Acts 2:42; 1 Pet 4:11;  
Gal 1:6-9; Rev 22:18-19; Jude 3)

### Denominationalism

1. Manmade, without divine origin.  
The Lord is not the author of confusion nor denominationalism (1 Cor 14:33). Our Lord did not work against his own prayer for unity by establishing conflicting and contradictory denominations (John 17:20-21)
2. Will be rooted up (Matt 15:13)
3. Named after men, forms of church government, days, "ordinances," etc. Yet, we are to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet 4:11)
4. Catholicism had its beginning in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and Protestantism had its beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century
5. Earthly headquarters. Some in Rome, or Salt Lake City, or Independence, MO, or Cleveland, or Tennessee, etc.
6. Creeds, manuals, disciplines, confessions of faith, catechisms. Such reflects upon the all-sufficiency of the word of God (2 Tim 3:16-17)



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| 7.  | Added to (Acts 2:47)  | 7.  | Join. You do not join the family of God; rather, you are added to it (1 Tim 3:15; Acts 2:47)   |
| 8.  | Essential to salvation (Eph 5:23; Acts 20:28)   | 8.  | Can be saved and never be a member of a given denomination. Thus, denominationalism stands self-condemned as being unnecessary and non-related to salvation  |
| 9.  | Calvary-purchased (Acts 20:28; Eph 5:25)  | 9.  | No such price paid   |
| 10. | The apostles were members of this church (Acts 2:41)                                    | 10. | There was no apostolic membership in human denominations. After all, they were not even in existence   |
| 11. | The church of Christ's choice (Matt 16:18-19; Col 1:24)                                 | 11. | The church of man's choice. But read Psalm 127:1   |
| 12. | Entered by believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized (Acts 2:36-47; 8:26-40) | 12. | Human laws of induction. A man, being told he must have an experience of grace before he could be considered as a candidate for membership in a given denomination, made up a story. As a result, this denomination voted and accepted him. Later, his conscience bothered him because of the lie. Accordingly, he returned, stating the same, resulting in his expulsion from this denomination. He then observed, "They voted me in for telling a lie, and they voted me out for telling the truth!" |
| 13. | Jerusalem the birthplace (Zech 1:16; Isa 2:1-4; Mark 9:1; Luke 24:46; Acts 2:1-4)       | 13. | Varied places of beginning, with Jerusalem not being the place of beginning for a single one   |

## **Various Reasons Why the Church of Christ is Not a Denomination**

1. Denominationalism is contrary to the Lord's prayer (John 17:20-21)
2. Denominationalism is a fruitful cause of infidelity (John 17:20-21)
3. Denominationalism is wrong because Christ is not divided (1 Corinthians 1:11-13)
4. Denominationalism is wrong because the body of Christ is one, not many (1 Corinthians 12:13, 20; Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 3:15)
5. Denominationalism is contrary to one of the basic purposes of Calvary's cross (Ephesians 2:15-16)
6. Denominationalism is a vain attempt to serve God (Matthew 15:9; Psalm 127:1)
7. Denominationalism divides homes, when God wants homes united (Joshua 24:15; Amos 3:3; Mark 3:25)
8. Denominationalism is contrary to Paul's plea for unity, for undenominational Christianity (1 Corinthians 1:10)
9. Denominationalism is contrary to the apostle's doctrine (Romans 16:17-18)
10. Denominationalism is a sin that God hates (Proverbs 6:6-19)
11. Denominationalism implies that God is the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33)

12. Denominationalism is not apostolic
13. Denominationalism is destined for destruction (Mark 3:24-25)

## **The Cure for Denominationalism**

1. **We must have an unreserved commitment to the Bible as the sole, objective standard in religion.**
  - A. **If three people differ as to the time of day, they can settle their differences by consulting the objective time standard, the naval observatory time.**
    - 1) **That settles the matter and produces unity.**
  - B. **If a man goes to three different post offices, he will be given the same postage for the mailing of his package.**
    - 1) **Why? Because each postal clerk consults the same guide book.**
    - 2) **Unity exists because of allegiance to a single objective authority.**
2. **When all men will lay down their creeds, disciplines, manuals, confessions of faith, catechisms, think-so's, maybe's, and each with an unprejudiced and receptive heart turns to the word of God, then, and only then, will unity result.**
3. **We must be committed to being nothing, calling ourselves nothing, obeying nothing, and saying nothing **except** that which is authorized by the word of God.**
  - A. **Only then will we have "the unity of the spirit"**  
**Ephesians 4:1-6.**

- 4. Our Lord was undenominational and anti-denominational. His church cannot afford to be otherwise.**
  - A. Her plea is for pure, New Testament, undenominational Christianity!**
    - 1) It is encouraging when individuals are attracted to the true gospel and church of Jesus Christ!**

## Invitation

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*Richard Thetford, January 2013 (Based on a lesson by Wendell Winkler in "Introducing the church of Christ")*