

Know Your Bible

BY GENE TOPE

LESSON

CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

I. DENOMINATIONALISM

In Lesson 4 we studied the church of the New Testament. We discovered that Christ had come to build his church and that the saved were added to it. We also saw that Christ built only *one* church and that every Christian in the first century was a member of that church.

Today it is different! There are hundreds and hundreds of differing churches. Where did they all come from? Do they please God? Is there a remedy for religious division? These and similar questions enter the mind of the student as he reads the Bible. It is the purpose of this lesson to demonstrate that all believers can and should be one in Christ Jesus.

WHAT IS DENOMINATIONALISM?

Webster says a denomination is “a class, or society of individuals, called by the same name; a sect.” To go further it may be said that denominationalism is the dividing up of believers in Christ into religious parties. Each has its own human name, creed, organization, and terms of membership. Each must remain distinct one from the other in order to survive. Each one considers itself to be right, no matter how tolerant of others it may be.

The church of Christ was of divine origin; hence it was not a denomination in any sense of the word. Churches established since the first century are of human origin and of human wisdom. They are denominations because they teach differently from the original church. It is exactly in this way that one may identify a denomination. God does not intend for man to change one single thing originally taught by the apostles: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).

In the chart below we point out some errors practiced by denominations. Please compare these errors with the Bible truths stated below.

Denominational Error	Bible Truth
1. <i>Wearing Human Titles</i> (Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist)	1. <i>Wear Christ's Name</i> (Acts 11:26; Rom. 16:16; Col. 3:17).
2. <i>Infant Baptism</i>	2. <i>Believer Immersion</i> (Mark 16:16; Rom. 6:4).
3. <i>Instrumental Music</i> (Piano, Organ, Guitar)	3. <i>Singing Only</i> (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).
4. <i>Sabbath (Saturday) worship</i>	4. <i>First Day (Sunday) Worship</i> (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1, 2)
5. <i>Clergy—Titles and Dress</i> (“Reverend,” “Pastor,” “Father,” Robes, Collars)	5. <i>No Clergy; All Christians are Priests</i> (Matt. 23:5-12; 1 Pet. 2:5).
6. <i>Tithing and Fund Raisers</i>	6. <i>Giving “according to prosperity” on Sundays</i> (1 Cor. 16:2).

DOES THE CHURCH YOU ATTEND PRACTICE ANY OF THESE ERRORS?

Q U E S T I O N S

FILL IN THE BLANKS

- Every _____ in the first century was a member of the one _____.
- Today there are _____ and _____ of _____ churches.
- Denominationalism is the _____ of believers in Christ into _____.
- The Church of Christ was of _____ origin.
- Churches established since the first century are of _____ origin.

TRUE OR FALSE

CIRCLE CORRECT ANSWER

- T F 1. Christ only built one church.
- T F 2. It is all right to teach a gospel different from the one Paul preached.
- T F 3. The man who preaches another gospel will be accursed.
- T F 4. Denominations teach differently from the original church.
- T F 5. The Bible authorizes us to wear human names in religion.
- T F 6. The New Testament church wore Christ's name.

- T F 7. There are examples in the New Testament of infants being baptized.
- T F 8. Paul and Peter taught Christians to address them as “Reverend.”
- T F 9. In Matthew 23:5-12 Jesus tells us that teachers should wear special dress.
- T F 10. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 authorizes church bake sales and other fund raisers.

II. WHY DENOMINATIONALISM IS WRONG

It should be clear at this stage that denominationalism is wrong. When man takes upon himself human religious titles and practices, this alone is sufficient reason to condemn sectarianism. However, we wish to pursue the matter further to make it abundantly clear to every sincere seeker after truth that denominationalism is not the plan of God, but man.

Unscriptural

“Unscriptural” means that denominations are unknown to the New Testament arrangement. What denomination do you read of in the Bible? Instead of many churches, only *one* is spoken of. Jesus said, “I will build my church” (notice the singular use of the term “church,” Matt. 16:18). Paul makes this clear when he says: “But now are they many members, yet but one body” (1 Cor. 12:20).

To the one church in the city of Ephesus, Paul made an impassioned plea exhorting them to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” The inspired writer went on to explain: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:4-6).

It is evident then that no denominations existed in the first century. The church of Christ was under the authority of God, and throughout the world Christians all practiced the same things, believed the same things, and worshiped the same way.

If this lesson raises questions in your mind, we would like to help you solve them. At the back of this lesson is a space for your Bible questions. We promise a Bible answer.



If you are enjoying this Bible study course and would like to see others enrolled, too, why not talk it over with them today, and send us their name and address as provided in the space below.

Name: _____

Address: _____

ANTI-SCRIPTURAL

Not only is denominationalism unscriptural, it is actually against the Scriptures! When man adopts his own plan in preference to what God has said, he always goes against divine wisdom, incurring the wrath of God. Christ died that his disciples might all be united in the church. He planned that through their unity the world might believe in him. Christ prayed this for his disciples: "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20). Do you not think that man is extremely audacious when he not only ignores the prayer of our Savior, but proceeds to establish denominations to pamper his desires?

Paul delivered a scathing rebuke to the disciples at Corinth when division threatened. The Corinthians, being guilty of envying and division, were asked of Paul: "Are ye not carnal and walk as men?" (1 Cor. 3:3). In chapter 1 the inspired Paul says: "Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). Paul did not think that differing personalities needed different churches. He urged rather that Christians not only be of the "same mind," but even the "same judgment." As pointed out in Lesson 4, three questions were asked the Corinthians in verse 13 – "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" The correct answer to these inspired questions spells the death blow to denominationalism. Believers who accept these instructions will not be divided, nor follow men, nor wear men's names in religion.



FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. Denominationalism is not the plan of _____, but of _____.
2. "But now are they many members, yet but _____ body."
3. It is evident that no _____ existed in the first century.
4. Jesus prayed that his disciples might all be _____ "that the _____ may believe that thou hast sent _____."
5. Paul besought the Corinthians to be of the same _____ and the same _____.

- T F 1. Denominationalism is both unscriptural and anti-scriptural.
T F 2. The one body is the church (see Eph. 1:22, 23).
T F 3. The Bible offers but one hope, one faith, and one baptism.
T F 4. Christ prayed that his disciples would divide up into denominations.
T F 5. Paul wanted the Corinthians to wear his name.

III. THE REMEDY FOR DENOMINATIONALISM

The church of the first century was the answer to our Lord's prayer for unity. Paul could write in an affirmative way to the Ephesians saying, "there is *one* body." The Corinthians were instructed to "all speak the same thing." How did this amazing unity come about? How could thousands of first century Christians all speak the same things; be of the same mind and judgment? The answer lies in the fact that they were all following the same teaching or doctrine. Acts 2:42 tells us that the Jerusalem disciples "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." It is important to notice that it was the apostles' doctrine these early Christians followed. The apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit in this teaching. Christ himself promised, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). Paul affirms this of his Gospel: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11, 12). So, to follow the apostles' teachings is to follow the teachings of Christ.

If people today follow only the apostles' teaching, we will be united as those early Christians were. Because men have followed the teachings of men, rather than the apostles, denominationalism has resulted. For example: The Lutheran Church follows the teachings of Martin Luther; the Methodist Church follows John Wesley; the Presbyterian Church follows John Calvin. Let us give up human names and human creeds and return to the Bible as our sole authority in all religious matters. The Bible not only gives us a solid basis for unity, it assures us that we are following the will of God. John Says: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

WHAT CAN I DO!



What can you do? It is not necessary to wait for all the churches to unite (this will probably never happen). There is a way in which you can defeat denominationalism right in your own life—by becoming **SIMPLY A CHRISTIAN!** How is this done? Begin first of all by studying what Jesus requires of you; no more and no less. If you will believe in Christ, repent of sins, confess his name, and be immersed for forgiveness of sins, this will make you a Christian. You will not be a member of any denomination and you should not join any. Instead, find

and associate yourself with other disciples who have obeyed the gospel in the same way you have. Strive together with them to be the New Testament church: Worship regularly on the first day of the week; wear no human names; practice nothing in the work or organization of the church unauthorized by God in the New Testament Scriptures. This is the remedy for denominationalism. It is a way that cannot be faulted.



FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. The Jerusalem disciples continued _____ in the _____.
2. The _____ guided the apostles into _____ truth.
3. If we follow _____ the _____ teachings we will be _____ as early _____ were.
4. The Great Commission and the book of Acts tells one how to become a _____.
5. When one obeys these commands, he will not be a member of any _____.

TRUE OR FALSE CIRCLE CORRECT ANSWER

- T F 1. The first century church answered Christ's prayer for unity.
- T F 2. There is one body.
- T F 3. First century Christians all spoke the same thing.
- T F 4. Paul received his gospel from other men.
- T F 5. We can answer Christ's prayer for unity today.
- T F 6. Denominationalism results when we follow the teachings of men.
- T F 7. The Bible should be our sole basis of authority in all religious matters.
- T F 8. If you become simply a Christian, you are helping to defeat denominationalism.

T F 9. After becoming a Christian you should join the denomination of your choice.

T F 10. After becoming a Christian you should associate with others in striving to be the New Testament church.

IV. THE END OF DENOMINATIONALISM

On an occasion when the Pharisees were opposing the word of God, Jesus said: "Every plant, which my heavenly father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:13, 14). And so it shall be with denominationalism. God did not plant it. Religious division and denominationalism are devices of man, originating in the mind of man rather than the mind of God. Denominationalism opposes the will of God and Christ that his disciples should all be one. Its doctrines are contrary to Bible doctrine. It does not teach God's way of salvation. As God has done with every erroneous system, so he shall do with denominationalism: it shall be rooted up!

Consider yet another statement of Christ's: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:21-23). What a remarkable statement by our Savior! Your attention is called to the fact that these people are religious: They call him "Lord"; they prophesy; they can cast out devils; they have done many wonderful works. Yet, THEY ARE LOST: "I never knew you" are the words of Christ.

To be religious is not enough. We must do the will of our Father in heaven if we expect salvation. It makes a tremendous difference what one believes and practices in religion. We must be religiously right. What about you?



FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. God did not _____ denominationalism.
2. Denominationalism opposes the _____ of God and Christ that his _____ should all be _____.
3. "Not everyone that saith _____, _____, shall enter into the _____ of _____."
4. "Depart from me, ye that _____."
5. To be religious is not _____. We must be religiously _____.

TRUE OR FALSE**CIRCLE CORRECT ANSWER**

- T F 1. There are some plants which God has not planted.
T F 2. Denominationalism originated in the mind of God.
T F 3. Denominationalism shall be rooted up.
T F 4. Those condemned by Christ in Matthew 7:21-23 were religious people.
T F 5. Those condemned had not done the will of God.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM THIS LESSON

- The church of Christ is of divine origin.
- It is sinful to belong to any other church.
- You can defeat denominationalism by becoming simply a Christian.

Use this space to write in any questions you may have.

Student's Name _____
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Grade _____ E-mail _____

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