

Non-Denominational or Un-Denominational?



Answering the common question:

“Aren’t Christian Churches and Churches of Christ just another denomination?”

The short answer is “no”; the following is why.

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Restoration Movement Literature

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Now this preacher used to think the same thing back when he first became a Christian: that Christian Churches and Churches of Christ were just another denomination, even if they did not call themselves one.

So what was their reasoning behind their claim not to be denominational? Or even more recently, to be labeled, “un-denominational?”

According to Webster’s Dictionary, a “denomination” is the following:

“a religious organization whose congregations are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices.”

An example straight from Webster’s so as to understand the above definition in context:

“People from several different religious *denominations* participated in the event.” (Emphasis Webster’s)

“Methodists, Baptists, and other Christian *denominations*.” (Emphasis Webster’s)

This standardized English definition and example gives us much to go on:

1) “A religious organization”

Again, we can go back to Webster’s for a standardized definition here:

“an administrative and functional structure”

Quite simply, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Catholics, and all other “denominations” – by definition – have an

administrative and functional structure that exists outside the local church that plays some role in its administration or function.

By contrast, all Christian Churches and Churches of Christ are completely independent, and do not have – again by definition – “an administrative or functional structure” that is mandatory or necessary outside the local church.

It is also absolutely Biblical to describe the church as an “organism” – the body of Christ (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:27) – not an organization (a denomination, by definition).

2) “whose congregations”

It may be tiresome to keep going back to Webster’s, but it is the definition of simple words that have been so easily lost or even carelessly handled as to why there is confusion and difficulty on this and many other subjects today:

Definition of “whose” - “of or relating to whom or which especially as possessor or possessors”

Again – quite simply – Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and other denominations either partially or fully belong to its overseeing organization. At the very least, there is an obligation to it – financial, loyalty, or otherwise – that exists outside the local church.

Christian Churches and Churches of Christ do not “belong” in any way to any outside organization, nor is any mandatory obligation or membership required. The “organism,” that is the local body of Christ, only belongs to Christ (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:23), as His church universal.

3) “are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices”

Every denomination – by definition – has some kind of external creed, set of beliefs, or other requirements necessary to be a part of its external organization separate from the local church.

The Christian Churches and Churches of Christ are independently led and independently accountable to God alone. The body of Christ does not answer to an external organization (Galatians 1:10), but only God alone.

4) “People from several different religious denominations”

This example from Webster helps understand what “denominations” in English really means. When people say things like, “I’m a Methodist”, they are subscribing to a particular belief system with a particular practice that is common (although not necessarily universal) with Methodism. They are also prescribing to the non-Biblical label associated with their denomination. This is also true of Baptists (loosely), or Presbyterians, or another denomination.

Although there is some amazing continuity among many Christian Churches and Churches of Christ of belief and practice, there is absolutely no overarching organization that has any authority or ability whatsoever to “force” any church to do anything in any particular way. Only Christ is the Head of His church, and the eldership of each church is solely and doubly-responsible for what is taught and thus practiced in their local churches (James 3:1).

5) “Methodists, Baptists, and other Christian”

All denominations wear some kind of title besides the Biblical term “Christian” from Acts 11:26. This is to indicate their unique beliefs and practices as prescribed by their overseeing organization, creed, or other requirement.

Christian Churches and Churches of Christ only wear the name “Christian”. Many other groups – independent or also undenominational – also wear this title, so it is not unique (unfortunately), but it is both Biblical and accurate. “No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, and Bible names for Bible things” is a unique interpretive technique to the Restoration Movement churches that has resulted in remarkable coherence in understanding and practicing Scripture without any need for an overseeing organization, creed, or other extra-church organization.

There is no need for any of those things because Christ and His Word are sufficient! To require other organizations or creeds as tests of fellowship or membership is inherently superseding Christ’s Lordship and effectively putting the Bible as insufficient for faith and practice.

As well, it is inaccurate *historically* to name the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ as a denomination:

When the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ originated (before they even wore the above name), the call was directly *to come out of denominationalism* and simply go back to the Bible for all rule of faith and practice. The American Frontier especially was dearth of Christian influence, and the denominations at the time were impotent to supply the spiritual need of the Frontier.

The truth is that the denominational theology itself was impotent to do so. Mostly wrapped up in Calvinism, the American churches before the very late 18th century saw little need or use to evangelism, as they preached only God could save – and He saved whom He wanted to arbitrarily – so there was no point to reach the new frontier.

Denominational churches at that time, seriously, would require any new potential member-candidate to give an account (or, “testimony”) of

their super-natural experience that led to their salvation (an early and key Calvinistic false-doctrine called “irresistible grace”), and then the church *would vote on whether or not to accept them as members!* Of course, this bit of unfortunate history is no longer practiced or even spoken of (for obvious reasons), but can you imagine realistically trying to bring in new believers into the church if the church’s membership was based on the will of the local congregants instead of obedience to God through His Word?

As well, “infidel writings and clubs” sprung up everywhere in the American Frontier (at the time referring to atheism, not non-Muslim), influenced largely by French literature distributed during the Revolutionary War. France, naturally having experienced what the worst of corrupt religion could bring to society, had almost rejected religion entirely, and was “evangelizing” their newfound atheism better than the so-called churches in America were evangelizing the Gospel!

Out of France came atheistic philosophers like Voltaire who slammed Christianity, called out the hypocrites, described the Bible as a myth, and predicted “the death of Christianity within a generation.” Little did Voltaire and the other atheist sponsors know that out of this spiritual “black hole” in the American Frontier would come one of history’s greatest revivals:

Around 1793, a clear call back to the Bible came. Denominationalism was being shed, and centuries-old traditions were being called into question. Denominational theology, dogma, and practice were all examined against the Bible and rejected. Out of these ashes came a brave band of preachers, scholars, writers, professors, and statesmen who would lead America into a multi-generational revival from about 1800 to 1860 and then beyond. These men were the

founders of the Restoration Movement churches – the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ.

One main ideal among these Christians was the idea that each church should be independent, with Christ being the only Head of the Church. Creeds were rejected, because the sufficiency of the Bible was accepted. Organizations outside the local church were not seen as overseeing organizations, but only helpful inasmuch that they served a purpose the local church may struggle to do on its own – such as reach international missions.

Within a generation, this group of local churches united on nothing more than Christ and His Word spread like wildfire in the United States and around the world. The shedding of denominational labels, traditions, and theology did nothing but feed the flame of revival for even generations to come.

Interestingly enough, interdenominational joining, Calvinism, traditions, “statements of faith” (i.e. creeds), atheism, and liberalism are all coming back into the cultural-mainstream today. The same obstacles to revival that were present at America’s birth are now back full-steam at its precipice of spiritual hollowness again. What will it take to bring revival back to America? What will it take to turn this country back to God?

The solution is not new or difficult to understand – but it will take a whole new generation to learn: go back to the Bible, abandon all creeds, traditions, denominationalism, and liberalism, and simply live out the New Testament rule of faith and practice. Accept the Bible as sufficient, stop with any organization above Christ and His church, abandon non-Scriptural practices that have led to division, and get back to serving Christ as He described and exemplified through His Apostles.

It will take a whole new generation of Christian leaders of all kinds, types, and from every vocation, race, culture, and background to unite around one thing – the Bible – and to return to it as their spiritual forefathers did over 200 years ago. America once saw great revival because people read the Word of God and did what it said instead of what any man ever said or did. America can once again see revival if people everywhere will do just that!

This is where the unfortunate ignorance of church history in America is very unfortunate: the same issues that were at America's darkest spiritual hour 200+ years ago are back again, and of course nobody from that time is around today to sound that alarm as a first-hand witness. Instead, we have to read history – actually learn from it – and see therefore the path to Biblical Christianity (and thus unity) that can come from it.

Many – even in Restoration Movement originated churches – dismiss recent church history as irrelevant. The modern trend is to unite with believers of other denominations – “to join forces” in a word – and that somehow this would result in a stronger “church”. The problem is that Scripture *does not advocate* this method: Jude contested for the “faith once for all the saints” (Jude 1:3). As well, Paul pleaded that the churches would be of one mind – one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Ephesians 4:5) – not divided on these crucial subjects! If we attempt to join forces with those who believe and practice differently than we do, this will have no fruit, but just a dilution of precious resources that God has made us a steward.

Historical trends that should be obvious to “educated” preachers and teachers as reoccurring today is the resurgence of atheism with Calvinism (which this preacher believes has a causal relationship, not just

a correlating one), liberalism with interdenominational practice, and creeds (“statements of faith”) and traditions being effectively held above the Bible. We see these same things in our own country’s religious heritage; why can we not see the signs of times that their resurgence today is Satan’s old trick to bring this country back to a place of spiritual darkness?

It will only be when Christians obey the call of God in Revelation 18:4 – “come out of her my people” – and in the context of Revelation chapters 17+18, her “harlot daughters” (Revelation 17:5) as well – that we can only hope to enjoy the goodness and blessings that God’s united and righteous church bestows upon its followers.

Today’s prevailing attitude of false unity by sacrificing truth on the altar of getting-along-at-any-cost must be abandoned if Christians are to truly return to being Christ’s bride, and not the world’s cohabitating harlot. These are harsh words, but they are not meant to be anything but the very message Christ has for us in 2 Timothy 4:3-5 and Revelation 18:4 among many others: we are to be a set-apart people, a holy church, “a virgin bride” (Revelation 21:1ff) – anxiously awaiting our bridegroom!

Christ predicted that for this exclusivity by default (being Christians only, and only adhering to Christ through His Word and none other), that the world would hate us (John 15:18). If the world includes other believers who wish to adhere to their traditions and denominational loyalties above the Word of God, this is what we are called to – to be “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). Yet, we should plea for our case with gentleness and love, always being ready with an answer for the hope that we profess (1 Peter 3:15).

Finally, *logically* it cannot be argued that the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ are a denomination because one is to accept that,

then one must accept that any church is necessarily part of a denomination – a logical absurdity:

If a church belongs to no overseeing organization,

If a church has no creed but Christ,

If a church has no book but the Bible,

If a church has no Head but the Lord Jesus,

If a church has no names but Bible names for Bible things,

If a church by every standardized English definition and example cannot be classified with other denominations as it is understood by those definitions and examples,

Then that church is – by definition – is not part of any denomination.

The truth is that denominations are an affront to the cries for unity by Biblical truth that Christ begins making in John chapter 17, that Paul speaks of Ephesians 4, and others plea for throughout the New Testament. Joining, aiding, or supporting denominationalism by nature is telling Christ to expect several different potential brides upon His return – a logical absurdity at best, heresy at worst.

So, if you presently belong to a denominational church – or have friends or family that do – it must be a worthy question to ask if one really is in allegiance to Christ, the Head, and His Word, the Bible, or to a cultural or familial tradition that has you or others unwittingly loyal to an organization instead of “the organism” that is the body of Christ?

We need revival in our country again – revival in our churches – revival in our lives! This will only happen if we go “back to the Bible”

again and again, seeking His will, His way, no matter what it may shed from our religious thoughts and practice as a result.

The early Restoration leaders brought about a multi-generational revival that in some respects has only recently fizzled out: while Calvinism and atheism, denominationalism and liberalism, and creeds and traditions have made their bold, un-Biblical return, the call “to come out of her my people” is stronger than ever. Regardless if we are at, near, or far from the actual end times is not relevant –Jesus says He is coming soon – and when He does, the call is to be a virgin bride, ready for her Husband (Revelation 21:1ff), ever watchful.

This cannot be done if we are divided, believing and practicing different things, pretending to cooperate on certain matters, ill-prepared for the challenges ahead for us in the 21st century. It will take brave, independently-minded individuals – both men and women – who wish to stand for truth above dogma, unity based on the Bible and not on a false definition of tolerance, and the Lordship of Jesus above their organizations and presidents and boards. Once that is done, God can and will send revival again!

God has been in the business of saving souls since the beginning of time (Genesis 3:15); Jesus only prayer requests He asks of us is to pray for God to send workers out into His harvest fields (Matthew 9:35-38; Luke 10:2); and God waits patiently still for sinners to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

However, people cannot believe unless the evangelists are sent (Romans 10:15), and they cannot hear and respond in faith unless the Word is preached to them (Romans 10:17). May we pray for workers in the harvest field, and may we recognize that we might be the answers to

those prayers – that God may send us like He did Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8 – “Here I am, Lord. Send me.”).

Jesus is not calling us “join” other traditions, “tolerate” other creeds, and “surrender” to other overseeing so-called authorities – He is calling us back to the Bible – His Word – under His Lordship – to obey His Great Commission - preparing for His return!