



DENOMINATIONALISM

Denominationalism refers to a “denominational or sectarian spirit or policy; the tendency to divide into denominations or sects” (*Random House College Dictionary*). In religion, the term refers to the multitude (some identify thousands) of religious bodies professing belief in Jesus the Christ as the only begotten Son of God, yet **differing** in name, belief, and practice from each other.

One does not have to be a Bible scholar to realize that Jesus did not intend for His followers (i.e., his church) to be thus divided. His prayer concerning those who would believe on Him was “that they may all be one” (John 17:21a). He expressed the pattern for that unity in his next breath: “Even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee” (v. 21b).

Denominationalism is a synonym for religious division. It is a direct contradiction of Jesus’ prayer. Some laud such division for its variety of names, doctrines, and practices, which offers so many choices. Its apologists count the distinctions between churches as inconsequential “because we are united in our belief in Christ” (which, incidentally, may or may not be true by New Testament definition). All who praise denominationalism, however, ignore the pattern of perfect unity between the Father and the Son—the sort of unity for which Jesus prayed. Did the Divine Son and His Father subscribe to differences in doctrine and behavior? Jesus and the Father were one (John 14:7).

The New Testament’s depiction of the church, as Jesus planned it and as the apostles established it, was not only **non-denominational**; it was **anti-denominational**, as seen in the following facts:

- Jesus promised to build—and built—only one church (Mat. 16:18); denominationalism consists of many churches.
- Jesus’ church is “narrow” with few members (Mat. 7:13); denominationalism is a “broad way” that attracts many in its acceptance of many names, doctrines, and practices (v. 14).
- Jesus’ church observes the authoritative will of its Founder (Col. 3:17); denominationalism caters to the whims, desires, traditions, and opinions of men (Mat. 15:9; Col 2:8).
- Jesus will save those who are in His church and remain faithful to Him (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23); denominationalism holds “church membership” to be unnecessary to salvation.
- Jesus’ church is an unshakable spiritual kingdom (Heb. 12:28); denominationalism will be uprooted because it is not of God (Mat. 15:13).

Jesus’ church is not a denomination—and vice versa.

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