

Is The Church of Christ a Denomination?

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It is apparent that many members of the church conceive of the church of Christ as merely another denomination among the thousands that men have founded. Such statements as “I am a Church of Christ” “I am a Church of Christ,” and references by members of the church to “the other denominations” are dead giveaways. Well-meaning but ignorant brethren sometimes refer to me as their “pastor” and even as “Rev. McClish.” *Clergy, laity (or layman), sacrament*, and other denominational terms are heard in the speech of many saints.

The sectarian expression urging people to “pray the ‘sinner’s prayer” and accept Christ as their personal Savior” (which may include anything from meditation to “Holy Spirit baptism”) is now used by some in the church, including preachers. Many brethren make unscriptural use of the term, *witnessing*, when describing personal evangelism.

The foregoing symptoms are only a few of many that demonstrate the adoption of denominational nomenclature and concepts on the part of not a few in the church. Various factors likely figure into this phenomenon that was among only the most brash liberal rebels half a century ago. Consider some of the identifiable factors that have produced these symptoms:

- Neglect of Bible study by those in the pew is a major cause. There are few in the age-range of forty sixty years who could be called “walking Bibles” as was commonplace in preceding generations of saints. Ignorance of Truth is but fertile ground for error. Denominational terminology and concepts easily took hold in minds that were devoid of the Truth.
- Preachers contributed to this general ignorance beginning three or four decades ago by preaching less if at all on the distinctiveness of the church or by softening what they said on the subject. Some did so because of pressure from worldly members who did not want their denominational friends to be offended. It was compromise or move on for many, and many compromised. Others had come to believe the church is a denomination and apologize for ever having preached otherwise, promising never to do so again.
- Eldershops are major contributors. They have allowed preachers to neglect preaching on the identity of the church in contrast to denominationalism. Elders have told not a few preachers to “tone down” any such material in their sermons and have sent good men on their way when they refused to do so. After all, they have a big building note to pay every month, and they dare not risk offending brother and sister Moneybags.

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- “Christian” university administrators/professors have progressively steered their institutions to a posture of union with denominational causes. It is not uncommon to see such institutions generously load their lectureships with brethren to whom the church is a denomination and/or with outright denominationalists. Liberal schoolmen have produced a steady stream of books over the past thirty years, openly calling the church a denomination.

There seems to be a strong general tendency to refrain from taking a firm position on certain doctrines and moral issues and to ignore even fatally false positions as minor matters. Several professors and pulpiteers among us obviously deem themselves wise enough to improve on God’s plan for the church and for man’s salvation. I lament that the avowed shameless aim of some is to lead the church into denominationalism which they already conceive it to be.

New Testament teaching on the church is not only utterly silent concerning any denominational concept of the church, but rather, it is radically opposed to said concepts. For example:

- Christ’s way is narrow, with few travelers (**Matthew 7:13-14**): denominationalism embraces all professed believers in its “broad” view of “the church.”
- The Lord’s way is One (**1 Corinthians 1:10-13; Ephesians 4:4**); in man’s concept all religious roads lead to Heaven.
- Christ will save His church because all of the saved are in it (**Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23**) men conceive of “church membership” as unnecessary to salvation.

While the New Testament knows nothing of denominational concepts relating to the church, it explicitly condemns such concepts in principle (**Matthew 7:13-14; 15:6-14; John 17:21-23; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; Ephesians 4:1-6**; et al.). Christ did not build, die for, add people to, promise to save, and is not the head of anything **but His church**. It is not even a thirty-second cousin to the plethora of man-made denominations that burden the world.

When one bears the Gospel and learns that God, because of the death of Christ, will forgive his sins upon the conditions of a declared faith in the Christ as God’s Son, repentance of his sins, and baptism for forgiveness of his sins, and he does these things, then **the Lord adds him to His church (Acts 2:37-47)**, and to no other. If several people thus hear and obey and continue to follow the teaching of the apostles (**Acts 2:41-42**), are they the Lord’s church, or are they a man-made denomination?

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Before anyone labels these propositions and conclusions “narrow-minded” Or “judgmental” he would do well to try to refine the truth of them. It may be understandable when outsiders misunderstand and disagree with these principles of Truth, but it is perplexing and distressing to see church members who either do not know or do not care about them.