

"FOLLOWING JESUS WITHOUT DENOMINATIONALISM" **The Way Out Of Religious Division**

INTRODUCTION

In our previous lesson, we began this series by defining the terms "denomination" and "denominationalism". And we considered three reasons why "denominationalism" is wrong. But is it possible for people today to simply be Christians, without being a member of any man-made denomination? The answer is "Yes!" Indeed, by following the example of Jesus Himself, we can be members of His body, the Lord's church, just as we read about in the scriptures!

I. THE EXAMPLE JESUS HAS SET FOR US

A. THE RELIGIOUS CLIMATE OF HIS DAY...

1. When Jesus came to this earth, the Israelites were living under the Law of God as given by Moses
2. In that law, God had not made any provision for the division of His people into religious sects or parties
3. Yet, by the time of Jesus, the Jews had formed several distinct religious parties:
 - a. Pharisees (somewhat conservative)
 - b. Sadducees (very liberal, the "modernists" of their day)
 - c. Essenes (radical isolationists)
 - d. Herodians, Zealots (political religionists)
4. It was assumed that all who were serious about religion would be associated with one of these groups

B. THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS...

1. To which of these groups did Jesus belong? He belonged to NONE of these groups!
2. Instead, He maintained a "non-sectarian" relationship with God to the very end
 - a. As an Israelite, living at a time when the Law of Moses was still in effect, He was simply an "Israelite"
 - b. In addition, He encouraged all to live by the Law while it was still in effect - cf. Matt. 5:17-20
 - c. In other words, He encouraged all to simply be what the Law of Moses intended them to be (i.e., "Israelites")

C. WHAT WOULD JESUS BE TODAY?

1. If He were on earth, would He be a Baptist, or Catholic, or Presbyterian, or Methodist, etc.?
2. If He was simply an Israelite then, would He not simply be a "Christian" today?
3. That was certainly what His disciples came to be called - cf. Acts 11:26

II. THE LORD'S CHURCH IN THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.

A. PROMISED BY JESUS...

1. Jesus promised to build HIS church - cf. Matt. 16:18
2. The word "church" comes from the Greek word EKKLESIA, which means "a called-out group, an assembly, a congregation"
3. Therefore, Jesus was promising to create His own group of people who have been "called" – cf. 1 Pet. 2:9-10

B. ESTABLISHED THROUGH THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL...

1. How does this "calling" take place?
2. According to the apostle Paul, we are "called" by the gospel of Christ - 2 Thess. 2:14
3. On the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ, we see by preaching the gospel Peter "called out" those who were willing to express their faith in Jesus - Acts 2:38-41
4. Notice that those who gladly responded in faith, repentance and baptism were "added" to the church (ekkleisia) – cf. Acts 2:47
5. The day of Pentecost was the beginning of the Lord's church

C. EXPANDED THROUGH THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL...

1. At first, the church existed only in Jerusalem
2. As the gospel spread, and people responded to it, groups of these saved people in various cities met together
3. Each group became known as a church in a "local" sense (in contrast to the church "universal" which is made up of all those saved throughout the world)
4. For example, during Paul's first missionary journey, many such churches were established - Acts 14:21-23
5. By simply teaching the gospel of Christ, a local church was formed when those who obeyed the gospel joined together in their work and worship

D. EDIFIED THROUGH THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE...

1. Though united in Christ, these local churches were independent of any human association or federation of churches
2. Christ directed them through His inspired apostles, as they taught them how to worship and work together - cf. Acts 2:42
3. Sometimes this teaching by the apostles was done directly, other times by appointed emissaries - e.g., 1 Cor. 4:17
4. Just as often, the teaching was done through the epistles or letters written by the apostles - cf. 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; 2 Thess. 2:14-15; 3:14

III. THE WAY OUT OF RELIGIOUS DIVISION

A. ACCEPT THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL...

1. Remember, Christ calls us into His ekklesia (church) through the gospel
2. Therefore, we can begin by obeying the same instructions that Peter gave on the Day of Pentecost - Acts 2:37-38

3. By repenting of our sins, and being baptized for the remission of our sins, we would then receive the same blessings as did the 3000 on that day: SALVATION!
4. By being saved in this manner, we KNOW that the Lord truly adds us to HIS church just as He added them - cf. Acts 2:47

B. FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS...

1. The early Christians continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine
- Acts 2:42
 - a. They joined no other religious organization, and NEITHER SHOULD WE!
 - b. By being in Christ, we are automatically united with all others who are in Him!
2. As members of the Lord's church, we should study carefully the New Testament description of the church that continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine
 - a. This description is found in the Book of Acts and in the Epistles which follow it
 - b. It is here that we will find instruction from the Lord's apostles on HOW:
 - 1) To worship the Lord acceptably
 - 2) To be scripturally organized as local congregations
 - 3) To live and work together as Christians, spreading the gospel of Christ through word and example
3. Since the apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit, we may be sure their instructions were exactly what Jesus wanted them to be!
 - a. If we duplicate the early churches by following the apostles' instructions, we will simply be "Christians", and we can be certain the Lord is pleased with us
 - b. As Jesus said to His apostles about those who would receive or reject their instructions:

**"He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."
- Lk 10:16**

CONCLUSION

Simply being a Christian and duplicating a New Testament congregation is not as difficult as one might think. There are literally thousands of such congregations throughout the world. So, by following the example and teachings of Jesus, as revealed by His apostles, we can be led out of the religious confusion that dominates the religious world today!

**** Much of this outline was adapted from outlines by Mark A. Copeland, a preacher in the Church of Christ**

(Questions compiled by instructor)

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"Following Jesus without Denominationalism"
Lesson #2
Instructor: John E. Branch
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Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the rationale of one's thinking, when shown by the scripture that denominationalism is wrong (i.e., sin), he/she insists on remaining a part of it.
2. Does that way of thinking somewhat identifies with the people in Jeremiah's day? (cf. Jer. 6:16-19).
3. What does it say about a person who claims that "The Lord is the head of my life", and yet refuses to follow the example set by the Lord in religion?
4. Discuss how following denominationalism shows that one has fallen victim of a perverted gospel. What tragic end awaits such a one? (cf. Gal. 1:6-9).
5. Discuss how thankful you were (Those who were once a part of denominationalism) when you learned the nature of the Lord's church and obeyed the gospel of Christ.
6. Discuss the importance of letting go of our way of thinking, feelings, etc., and trusting in God to direct our path to please Him. (cf. Prov. 3:5-6; Isa. 55:8-9).
7. If denominationalism was not pleasing in Jesus' day and He established the New Testament church so that all could be one, does it not stand to reason that it is not pleasing today? Why or why not? Discuss how to reject His one true church is the same as rejecting Him.