

Is the CHURCH OF CHRIST a DENOMINATION?

by Robert Hatfield

Division is very much a sign of the times. One needs only to look around to find the division in today's homes and political systems, and division is clearly portrayed in religious beliefs through denominationalism. In the first century, Paul wrote about the certainty of an upcoming apostasy: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith..." (1 Tim. 4:1), "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine..." (2 Tim. 4:3).

Today Paul's warnings are a reality. Religious sects exist all throughout the land; they wear man-made names and serve man-made creeds. However, it seems as if some members of the church get caught up in denominationalism to the point that they believe the church of Christ is merely another religious group that should be categorized with man-made religions. Is the church of Christ a denomination?

The concept of denominationalism is foreign to the Bible. When one reads the word "church" in the Bible, he or she does not have to ask, "*Which church?*" because there is only one church in the Bible. The church of the Bible is the one Jesus promised to build (Matt. 16:18); it is the one for which Christ died (Acts 20:28). The church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18), and the Bible says there is only one body (Eph. 4:4). There are no denominations in the Scriptures; the Bible simply tells of the one church that Christ came to establish.

The Kingdom was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus said the church is the same thing as the kingdom when He promised to give Peter the keys to the kingdom (Matt. 16:19). There is no question but what the conversation in Matthew 16:13-19 is about the church, therefore, the church and the kingdom are the same institution (cf. Mark 9:1; John 3:3-5; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9). Bible students observe that the kingdom, or the church, is always referred to in future tense up until Acts 2. The kingdom is referred to in present tense in Acts 2 and throughout the rest of the New Testament. The kingdom has been established. The church for which Christ died has existed since the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and it continues to exist today!

The church of the Bible — the one for which Christ died — meets all of man's needs. Sin is the problem (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). The church is the solution. Its members receive the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7). Salvation is in the church (Eph. 2:8). Members of the church are the children of God (1 John 3:1ff.). In the church sinners are reconciled to God (Eph. 2:16).

The church of Christ is not a denomination; it is the church of the Bible! Our goal is to be members of that one, true church. Christ's church existed **before** denominationalism, and it will continue to exist after all things human and worldly are no more (1 Cor. 15:50).

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