**"CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE CHURCH" - Denominationalism**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. A great challenge confronting the church is **denominationalism**...

 a. More than 38,000 different denominations!

 b. Hinders the spread of the gospel - **Jn 17:21**

**(John 17:20-21),** *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”*

2. Denominationalism confronted the church early

**Note:** Catholic church could be called the first of the modern denominations, as it is an apostasy from the true church…

 a. Protestant reformation (ca. 1517 AD) **BUT…**

 b. Gnosticism, traced to the second century AD

*First heretical sect or division after the close of the New Testament*

[What is denominationalism? Why is it wrong?]

**I. DEFINING TERMS**

**A. WHAT IS A DENOMINATION...?**

 1. "A large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy." - **The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language**

2. Examples: **The Roman Catholic Church** is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the pope in Rome; **The Eastern Orthodox Church** is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the patriarch of Constantinople; **The Anglican Church of England** is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the archbishop of Canterbury; **The Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod)** is made up of those churches that submit to the synod in Missouri

Synod - an assembly of the clergy and sometimes also the laity in a diocese or other division of a particular church.

**B. WHAT IS DENOMINATIONALISM...?**

 1. T**he American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language**: a. "The tendency to separate into religious denominations"; b. "Advocacy of separation into religious denominations"; c. "Strict adherence to a denomination; sectarianism"

 2. For this study, see definition, b.

 3. Some consider it a blessing!

 4. “Join the church of your choice”

 5. NOT the Bible perspective

**II. WHY DENOMINATIONALISM IS WRONG**

 **A. IT IS UN-SCRIPTURAL...**  In the New Testament... a. Local congregations were independent, autonomous; b. Church organization was limited to within the local congregation; c. With elders (also known as pastors, bishops, overseers, presbyters) appointed to oversee only the congregation of which they were members - cf. [**Ac 20:17**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2020.17)**,**[**28**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2020.28)**;** [**1Pe 5:1-2**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Pe%205.1-2)**.** The only authority above the local church in the NT was Christ and His apostles. Synods, individuals, conferences, etc., usurp authority!

**(Acts 20:17, 28), (17),** *“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.”* **(28),** *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*

**B. IT IS ANTI-SCRIPTURAL... (Actually opposed to scriptural principles)**

(**[Jn 17:20-23](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Jn%2017.20-23%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank);** [**1Co 1:10-13**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%201.10-13)**;** [**1Co 3:3-4**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%203.3-4)**;** [**Ep 2:14-16**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ep%202.14-16)**)**

**(John 17:20-23),** *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”*

**(1 Corinthians 1:10-13),** *“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”*

**(1 Corinthians 3:3-4),** *“for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?”*

**(Ephesians 2:14-16),** *“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”*

**C. IT IS HARMFUL TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST...**

("that the world may believe" - [**Jn 17:21**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Jn%2017.21)**) See above**

**D. OTHERS WHO VIEWED DENOMINATIONALISM AS WRONG...**

 1. **Martin Luther**, a leader of the Reformation:

 "I ask that men make no reference to my name, and call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? …No, no, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names, and call ourselves Christians after Him Whose doctrine we have." - **Hugh Thomason Kerr, A Compend of Luther’s Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943, p. 135)**

2. **Charles Spurgeon**, famous Baptist preacher:

 "I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living! I hope that the Baptist name will soon perish, but let Christ’s name last forever." – **Spurgeon Memorial Library, Vol. I., p. 168**

 **-- Note well: these individuals were bemoaning the use of denominational titles, not organizational ties per se.**

**CONCLUSION**

If local churches are to successfully confront the challenge of denominationalism, they must...

 a. Remain independent, congregations

 b. Refuse organizational associations w/ churches

 c. Refrain from using denominational names

Churches that succeed in avoiding denominationalism are more likely to be...

 a. Nothing more than local churches of Christ

 b. Christians who simply seek to follow Jesus

 c. The answer to the prayer of our Lord for unity

cf. [**Jn 17:20-21**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Jn%2017.20-21) **(See above)**