

*Why the Churches of Christ Are **Not** A Denomination*

By Donald A. Nash

When just a lad in high school, I was in a class in which the teacher questioned all the students concerning their religious faith, whether they were Catholic or Protestant, and as to what denomination they belonged if Protestant. I had just heard a great gospel preacher discourse on the theme of this tract, so when she came to me, I said simply, "Christian," in reply to her question.

"Yes, I know," she said, "but are you Protestant or Catholic?"

"Neither," I replied. "But you have to be one or the other," she exclaimed, becoming very aggravated.

After she could not move me on this declaration, she attempted to discover to what denomination I belonged, and again I insisted that I belonged to none and was simply a Christian. This position astounded her, and I believe she simply credited it to my ignorance from the subsequent grades I received.

However, the incident was illuminative of the ignorance on the part of the majority of denominational people in regard to the position of the churches of Christ. The cause for this ignorance stems in the lack of understanding by the membership of the churches themselves who do not understand the undenominational position of the Christian church. To the end of educating those who profess to be Christians only, and to lead denominational people to the simple New Testament church, this tract is written.

The historical position of the members of the Churches of Christ, or Christian churches, has been un- or non-denominational. We are not inter-denominational as some sects, movements, and organizations claim to be. There is a difference! Inter-denominational organizations condone sectarianism, simply being cooperative agencies of various denominations. We, however, believe denominationalism and sectarianism to be sinful. See 1 Corinthians 1: 10-13 and 3:1- 5, where Paul criticizes the divisions of the church at

Corinth. See also John 17, where Christ prays for the unity of His followers. Denominationalism destroys this unity and hence is sinful. See also the 4th chapter of Ephesians, where Paul exalts the unity of the church.

Now, a denomination is a group of professed followers of Christ which divides itself from other professed Christians by adopting procedures over and above those found in the Scriptures, thus dividing the church universal. This separation may come through any of the following ways:

1st: By taking a name other than a scriptural one. Thus, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, a Lutheran, or a Baptist, by taking a human name, separates or denominates himself as different from the others.

2nd: By taking another rule of discipline above the New Testament. Thus, the Presbyterians, who accept the Westminster Confession of Faith; the Episcopalians, who accept the Thirty- nine Articles of Faith; or the Baptists, who accept the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, all separate themselves from each other by denominating their groups through these disciplines and creeds.

3rd: By adding any doctrine to the practice of the New Testament church. Thus, the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans, who add infant baptism and affusion to the accepted and acknowledged

practice of the immersion of the penitent believer in the New Testament church, separate themselves from those who adhere strictly to the apostolic pattern.

4th: By establishing a governing organization over themselves which is over them only, and which supercedes the simple autonomous authority of the local congregation under Christ. Thus, the Methodists, Presbyterians, Catholics, Lutherans, and every great evangelical group have councils, synods, conferences, and officials ruling their particular denominations.

None of these practices, which denominate or separate into peculiar groups of professed followers of Christ, are sanctioned by those desiring to restore the church of the New Testament. We have no particular denominational name. We are known simply as Christians. See Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16, for the use of this God-given name by the apostles in the New Testament. The use of any other name is sinful, because it divides or denominates. We are members of the church of Christ, which was established by Christ through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit inspired apostles on the day of Pentecost. Certainly this church was not a denomination, since to denominate means to divide, and the church then was one body.

WE HAVE NO RULE OF DISCIPLINE over us except the New Testament. We have no creed except faith in Christ as God's Son and our Savior, the Founder and Foundation of the one true church. It is true that tracts, articles, and books have been written explaining this position of undenominational Christianity, just as I am writing this tract, but these are not authorized disciplines, being made tests of fellowship over any congregation. We have no ecclesiastical organization over any church or congregation. Every local congregation is free under the authority of Christ and His Word. WE HAVE NOT ADDED or subtracted any practice, teaching, or ordinance to that of the New Testament Church. We desire to restore the church founded by Christ and His apostles, as recorded in the New Testament. To do this we approach the New Testament historically, rather than theologically. That is, we do not impose theological views or opinion upon passages from the Scriptures, but simply attempt to do what the divinely inspired apostles did. Although man may differ over the meaning or interpretation of a passage of Scripture, or a practice, it is easy to ascertain what the apostles actually did. The universal mind of scholars is agreed on what these practices were. Thus we know that they preached Christ as God's Son, who died to effect men's salvation, that He arose, and that He ascended into heaven. They commanded people to believe this message and, believing, to repent, or change their way of life. They demanded of those desiring entrance into the church a confession of faith, and they baptized these by immersion. Thus, when individuals believed, repented, confessed, and were baptized, God added them to His Church. No man or group of men voted people into His church, neither did they set down the requirements for entrance into the church. These requirements were given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For church life the apostles practiced prayer and the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34), which was a simple spiritual remembrance of Christ's death by eating unleavened bread and drinking of the fruit of the vine.

They urged people to live according to the teachings of Christ and to support the work of the church. For these historical records read the book of Acts, especially Acts 2 and Acts 8. We endeavor to imitate these practices. Our motto in this respect is, "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, love." Or, "No creed but Christ; no book but the Bible; no ordinances but those of the New Testament; no name but the name Christian."

One can readily see that there were no denominations in the New Testament. There was one true church of Christ, His body, made up of penitent believers who were baptized into Him (Ga. 3:21). Through the years divisions, sects, and denominations arose over human opinions, doctrinal corruptions, and the pride of men who built denominations around themselves.

Around the turn of the 19th century, there arose, simultaneously, in different places around the world, under the direction of different men, an effort to unite all professed Christians by restoring this true and only church of Christ, in doctrine, life, and practice. Those making up this movement identified themselves with the church of Christ (nondenominational) by following the New Testament pattern without human additions or subtractions, without denominational names, organizations, creeds, or practices. The growth of those taking this position has been astounding.

It is true that in the last half-century some who professed this position have been unfaithful to it, and have tried to form another denomination around the movement by crystallizing the name "Disciples of Christ" into a sectarian name, by making an organization known as the United Christian Missionary Society (and its successor) the governing body over Christian congregations, by formulating human rules for the church and for the Christian ministry, and by subtracting from the ordinances of the church revealed in the New Testament by denying the necessity of immersion for baptism. Those who desire to remain Christians only, and abhor unscriptural denominationalism, endeavor to escape these errors which lead back to the morass of human divisions.

It is this undenominational position alone which will bring about Christian unity, for professed Christians can never be united on man-made schemes and plans on which all will not, and cannot, agree. But the church revealed in the New Testament is simple enough to be followed and to unite all professed Christians. According to God's Word (John 17:21) it will only be when this unity is attained that the world can be won to Christ.

We exhort those who have been clinging to and supporting denominational names, practices, disciplines, and organizations to forsake these human foibles, and adopt the name of Christian only, and practice the commands of the New Testament alone in obedience to the authority of Christ, instead of the authority of the creeds and organizations of men. Let those who claim to hold this position be zealous in advocating it, scripturally qualified to defend it, and spiritually consecrated to making it appealing.