

Defenses Some Make for Denominationalism

Ephesians 3:21

INTRODUCTION:

- A. The existence of denominationalism is one of the greatest plagues in the history of mankind.
1. It robs the Lord of the glory that He is due in His church. **Ephesians 3:21** - “To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”
 2. Denominationalism, with all of its many different groups wearing different names and teaching different messages, causes great confusion in the minds of many people.
 - a. You may rest assured that such confusion is not from God.
 - b. **1 Corinthians 14:33** - “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”
- B. Denominationalism has many supporters.
1. In this study let us consider some of the more common arguments people sometimes use in an effort to defend denominationalism. We will examine six such arguments or “defenses”.
 2. Why do so many think it is alright?

ARGUMENT #1: “IT IS GOOD THAT THERE ARE SO MANY CHURCHES/CHOICES TO CHOOSE FROM, BECAUSE DIFFERENT PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT TASTES.” Sometimes it is said this like choosing a car or a mate (husband/wife) . . . the variety is a plus.

ANSWER:

- A. It is important to remember that illustrations don’t prove anything. They are simply a way of using a “for instance” in order to try and show by illustration what we are saying.
- B. In the spiritual realm, something is “good” only if it is God’s way.
1. **1 Thessalonians 5:21-22** - “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”
 2. We must be careful and not make an appeal to what men like (their “tastes”, etc.), or to what appears to be good.
 3. Saul of Tarsus thought it was good to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. **Acts 26:9-11** - “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to name of Jesus of Nazareth.

This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”

C. The major problem with this reasoning (having more “churches” is good because it makes for more choices) is this: the New testament plainly declares there is only one body . . . one church.

1. **Ephesians 4:4** - There is one body (singular) . . .”
2. **Ephesians 1:22-23** - “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church (singular), which is His body (singular) . . .”
3. **Ephesians 5:23-26** - “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church (singular); and He is the Savior of the body (singular).
Therefore, just as the church (singular) is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.
Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church (singular) and gave Himself for her (singular),
that He might sanctify and cleanse her (singular) with the washing of water by the word.”
4. **Matthew 16:18** - “. . . on this rock I will build My church (singular), and the gates (plural) of Hades shall not prevail against it.”
 - a. “My church” is singular.
 - b. “Gates” is plural.
 - c. Jesus knew the difference between singular and plural, and He used the singular in reference to the church.
5. In the New Testament, there is no concept of “many different denominations.”
6. Men may defend their man-made denominations, but they just aren’t in the Bible . . . and that is a fact.

ARGUMENT #2: “THE BIBLE SPEAKS ABOUT ‘CHURCHES’ PLURAL BEING IN EXISTENCE IN THE FIRST CENTURY. IF IT WAS RIGHT TO HAVE MANY CHURCHES THEN, THEN IT IS RIGHT NOW.” Romans 16:16 and other verses that mention “churches” are appealed to with the idea being that these “churches” were different denominations.

ANSWER:

A. The churches, as mentioned in **Galatians 1:2** (“ . . . To the churches of Galatia”) and **1 Thessalonians 2:14** (“For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus . . .”) were simply congregations of the Lord’s church in different localities.

1. They:
 - a. Followed the same doctrine.
 - b. Taught the same message.
 - c. Worshipped in the same manner.
2. They simply were located in different places.
3. Furthermore, it is a matter of historical record that Paul could not have been referring to modern denominations in any New Testament passage because no denominations existed at the time he wrote.

ARGUMENT #3: “WE ARE ALL GOING TO THE SAME PLACE (HEAVEN), WE ARE JUST GOING BY DIFFERENT ROADS. JUST LIKE YOU CAN TRAVEL MANY ROADS TO A MAJOR CITY (LIKE ATLANTA), SO THERE ARE MANY ROADS YOU CAN TAKE AND STILL END UP IN HEAVEN. A PERSON CAN GET TO HEAVEN IN ANY CHURCH.”

ANSWER:

- A. Again, illustrations do not prove whether something is right or wrong, they simply demonstrate what a persons trying to express.
- B. While it is true that there are a number of different roads one can travel and still end up in Atlanta, consider the following:
 1. If Jehovah God had designated what road He wants us to take in our effort to get to Atlanta, would we not be obligated to take that road and do what He said in order to please Him? Of course we would.
 2. I invite you to carefully consider this:
 - a. Isn't Jesus Christ the only way of salvation? He said Himself in **John 14:6** - “. . . I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
 - b. If Jesus is “the way” to the Father in heaven, then that excludes all other ways or paths.
 - c. Man made Atlanta and made many roads to enter it.
 - d. However, God made heaven and made only one road to enter it.
 - e. Jesus said in **John 10:1** - “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door [the way the shepherd made for the sheep to enter], but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.”
- C. There is only one “doctrine of Christ” in which we must abide. **2 John 9** - “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.”
 1. One who abides in that teaching has the Father and the Son.
 2. The person that goes beyond that doctrine does not have God.
 3. Who said that? God said that in 2 John 9.
- D. The Book of Acts shows there is only one “way” of salvation.

1. Consider these passages.
 - a. **Acts 9:2** - (Saul) “. . . and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way (not a way, but the way), whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”
 - b. **Acts 16:17** - (Philippi) “. . . These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way (not a way of salvation but the way of salvation) of salvation.”
 - c. **Acts 19:9** (Ephesus) - “But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way (not a way but the way) before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.”
 - d. **Acts 9:23** - (Ephesus) “And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way (again, not a way but the way).”
2. No, my listening friends, there are not many roads that will take one to heaven.
 - a. There are not many ways that will take one to heaven.
 - b. The road to heaven is through Jesus the Christ.
 1. Christ does His calling through the gospel and adds those who accept the gospel call to the church.
 2. **Ephesians 3:6** - “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.”
 - c. The faithful Christian can joyfully sing, “I’m in the way, the bright and shining way, I’m in the gloryland way.”

ARGUMENT #4: “JESUS TAUGHT THAT HE IS THE VINE AND DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS ARE THE BRANCHES.”

ANSWER:

- A. It is true that Jesus said in **John 15:5** - “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”
 1. But where in the context do we read about “denominations?”
 2. Nether the word itself nor the concept of denominations is within 260 chapters (the number of chapters in the New Testament) of Jesus’ statement.
- B. Jesus said in the next verse, John 15:6 - “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”
 1. Look at the pronouns in verse six.
 2. Jesus was speaking to and about individual disciples . . . not denominations.
 3. Verse 5 concluded with the statement, “for without me you can do nothing.”

- B. There were no denominations in existence at the time Jesus made this statement, He could not have been talking to them or about them.
1. Jesus was speaking to and about those who are “in” him.
 2. Denominations are not in Christ.
 3. Therefore, John 15:5-6 gives no support whatsoever for the existence of even a single denomination.

ARGUMENT #5: “PAUL SAID IN 1 CORINTHIANS 12:20 THAT THERE IS ONE BODY WITH MANY MEMBERS. “THE ‘MEMBERS’ ARE THE VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS OF OUR DAY.”

ANSWER:

- A. **1 Corinthians 12:20** - “But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.”
1. The context in which this passage is found clearly shows who these “members” are.
 - a. **1 Corinthians 12:27** – “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”
 - b. Now compare what is said in verse 27 with what is said in verse 20 and you will see that:
 1. The “members” in verse 20 are the “members individually” in verse 27.
 2. These are individual Christians . . . not individual denominations.
 2. Paul was writing to the church of God in Corinth (1:2). The “members of 12:20 were the individual members of the church in Corinth. Check it out.
- B. **Romans 12:4-6** also makes it clear that the “many members” are individual saints. “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,
 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.
- Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith”
1. Here Paul is addressing the individual members of the church in Rome . . . to whom he penned the Book of Romans in the form of the Roman letter.
 2. As is true in 1 Corinthians 12:20, so it is true in Romans 12:4-6: these are individual members of the church and not individual dominations as the denominational world may claim.
 3. Paul could not have been referring to modern denominations because none existed at the time he wrote I Corinthians or Romans.

ARGUMENT #6 “HOW COULD SO MANY INTELLIGENT, WELL-EDUCATED PEOPLE THAT ARE PART OF AND SUPPORT DENOMINATIONALISM ALL BE WRONG? LOOK AT ALL THE GOOD COMMENTARIES SUCH PEOPLE HAVE WRITTEN. THEY CAN’T ALL BE WRONG.”

ANSWER:

A. It is truly perplexing that “intelligent, well educated people” can be deceived . . . but they can.

1. Saul of Tarsus was certainly well educated, but he was sincerely wrong in his religious beliefs and activities. He well knew the law that was given to identify sin, but was ignorant of the law given to remove sin.
2. Throughout history, many “intelligent, well educated people” have been drawn into inappropriate activities or teachings.
 - a. Consider the German people that followed Hitler.
 - b. Consider intellectual professors at Harvard and elsewhere who proclaim that godless evolution is the right explanation of man’s origin.
 - c. Consider the millions upon millions of people who do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
3. make no mistake about it, Satan is able to deceive great multitudes because he is so deceitful and cunning, causing his servants to appear as ministers of righteousness. **2 Corinthians 11:13-15** - “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” A lot of transforming is going on there.
4. We must be careful that we not use the actions of mere human beings to try and establish what is right or wrong in God’s sight.

CONCLUSION:

- A. We have examined six major arguments put forth in “defense” of denominationalism.
 1. We have found that the each have one major point in common . . . they are lacking proof from the Scriptures.
 2. Friends, the Bible gives absolutely no support whatsoever for the existence of any denomination.
- B. Jesus said in **Matthew 15:13** - . . . Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.”
- C. may God help us to see this truth and boldly declare it to those who are mired in the doctrines and organizations of men.”
- D. **God’s Plan for Man’s Salvation**