

Five Distinctive Elements of Every Denomination

I Corinthians 1:10-13

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** What is denominationalism?

- A. A denomination is a subclass of a class of things.
- B. For example, \$1, \$5, \$20, \$50 bills are subclasses of U.S. currency.

2. A denomination is a part of the whole; a division.

- A. Christendom today is divided into a multitude of various denominational churches.
- B. All claim to be a part of the whole church.
- C. Some report there are as many as 30,000 to 40,000 different denominations (*Google*).

3. Look in the phone book (if you can find one!), denominational churches are a “dime a dozen.”

- A. Most people claiming to be “Christians” celebrate denominationalism.
- B. In their mind, “one church (i.e., denomination) is as good as another.”

******“The more sects we have the better. They are all getting somebody in (to the Church) that the others could not: and even with the numerous divisions we are all doing tolerably well.”

— **Abraham Lincoln**

“I love denominations. ...Denominations are beautiful.” — **Jason Todd**

4. **3** However, denominationalism is condemned in the Scriptures.

A. The entire concept of denominationalism is based on division.

- (1) Denominations only exist because people believe and practice different things religiously.
- (2) Such division is antithetical to unity:

Jn. 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.”

B. Paul condemned the concept of denominationalism as “carnal”:

I Cor. 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?”

I Cor. 3:3-4: “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”

C. Denominationalism is antithetical to the oneness of Christ.

- (1) Christ built only one church, not a multitude of different denominations:

Matt. 16:18: “And I say also unto thee, ‘That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’” (KJV)

- (2) Christ is the head of only one church:

Col. 1:18: “And he is the head of the body, the church...”

Eph. 4:4: “*There is one body...*”

(3) Christ shed His blood only for one church:

Acts 20:28: “...*to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*”

(4) Christ will save only one church, His church:

Eph. 5:23: “...*Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.*”; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4

5. **4** Denominations are very different from the church we read about in the New Testament.

A. Every denomination is distinguished by five elements:

(1) Proper name

(2) Human head

(3) Earthly headquarters

(4) Creed

(5) Centralized work

B. On the contrary, the church built by Jesus Christ, the one He shed His blood for, and the one He will save has none of these five distinguishing elements.

6. **5** In this lesson we will examine the five distinct elements common to every denomination.

II. DISCUSSION:

One distinct element common to every denomination is a...

I. **6** Proper name:

A. Like people, every denomination has a proper name.

(1) Proper names are spelled with capital letters:

(a) Craig Thomas

(b) United States of America

(c) © Microsoft

(d) United Methodist Church or Lutheran Church

(2) ****** But common nouns or names, like preacher, male, and citizen; are spelled with lower case letters.

(a) Craig Thomas is a male, a preacher, and a citizen.

(b) Common nouns or names are not proper names, as we shall see, but the denominations have all made this mistake on purpose!

B. ****** The word “denomination” has as its stem “nom” = name; keep that in mind; we are dealing with a properly named institution.

(1) For example, *Roman Catholic Church* is a proper name.

(a) BTW: The name is self-contradictory; “Catholic” means “universal.”

(b) Thus, “Roman Catholic” is an oxymoron! Nothing can be “Roman” and at the same time be “universal.”

(c) The proper name “Roman Catholic Church” is not found in the Bible, not even in a Roman Catholic version!

- (d) Ironically, the Roman Catholic Church traces its roots to the year 1054 AD
- (e) When the “Great Schism” took place and the Catholic Church separated into the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Catholic Church (aka Eastern Orthodox Church or Orthodox Church) over several issues, including the Papacy and the use of “images” (icons).
- (f) Both claim to be the “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.”
- (g) The Roman Catholic Church uses unleavened bread in the Lord’s Supper; while the Orthodox Church (“ortho,” Gr. = right, “dox,” Gr. = glory, or worship, doctrine) uses leavened bread.
- (h) The Roman Catholic Church uses images; the Orthodox Church rejects their use.
- (i) The Roman Catholic Church has an “infallible” Pope; Orthodox Church rejects the papacy; made up of “self-headed churches” with five “Patriarchs” as their top leaders (*Orthodox Research Institute*):
 - ☛ Constantinople (the “first among equals.”)
 - ☛ Alexandria
 - ☛ Antioch
 - ☛ Jerusalem
 - ☛ Moscow
- (j) In the Roman Church priests are required to be celibate (unmarried); in the Orthodox Church they are permitted to marry.

C. **7** There are many designations in the Scriptures that apply to the church that Christ built and shed His blood for; but NONE are a proper name!

- (1) “*church of God*” (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 3:5),
- (2) “*churches of God*” (1 Cor. 11:16; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4),
- (3) “*church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1),
- (4) “*churches of Christ*” (Rom. 16:16),
- (5) “*the church*” (Rev. 2:1, 8; 3:14),

D. **8** On the contrary, man has taken common nouns from the scriptures, turned them into proper names and used them to name their denominations. Note these examples:

- (1) *presbuteros* (Gr., for “elder,” 1 Pet. 5:1), Presbyterian Church
- (2) *episkopos* (Gr., for “overseer,” Acts 20:28; or “bishop,” 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7), Episcopal Church
- (3) *philos* (Gr. for “friends,” Jn. 15:14), Society of Friends (Quakers)
- (4) *ekklesia* (Gr. for “assembly,” Acts 19:41, 1 Cor. 1:2), Assembly of God Church
- (5) “*witnesses*” (Isa. 43:10), Jehovah’s Witnesses
- (6) “*brethren*” (Acts 15:1), Church of the Brethren
- (7) “*Nazarene*” (Matt. 2:23; Jesus “*called a Nazarene*,” because He was from that town), Church of the Nazarene

- E. **9** Some denominations use the names of their human founders for their proper name, e.g.:
- (1) Lutheran Church (Martin Luther)
 - (2) Wesleyan Church (John Wesley)
 - (3) Mennonite Church (Menno Simons)
- F. **10** Some promote the writings of their founders, or a peculiar doctrine as a proper name:
- (1) Seventh-Day Adventist Church (Ellen G. White, prophetess)
 - (2) Christian Science (Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*)
- G. **11** Some use proper names that emphasize their practices. For example:
- (1) baptism, by immersion (Baptist Church; ironical teach baptism unessential to salvation!)
 - (2) methodological studies (Methodist Church)
 - (3) tongue-speaking, miracles (Pentecostal Church, after events of the day of Pentecost)
 - (4) Sabbath (Saturday) observance (Seventh-Day Church of God)
- H. The church Jesus built and died for:
- (1) ****** Is made up, not of local churches of Christ, but of *Christians*. The only proper name given to the early disciples (Acts 11:26); *Christian* is a proper name for “*the disciples*,” not for the church.
 - (2) Ironically, this proper noun for “*the disciples*” has been turned into a proper adjective producing the denomination known as *The Christian Church* (cf. Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16).
- I. By turning common nouns into proper names many denominations claim to have “Bible names.” They all commit the same error.
- J. **12** The scriptures **never** assign a proper name to the church!
- (1) Romans 16:16 says, “...*the churches of Christ salute you.*”
 - (a) The passage does not say, in capital letters: “The Church of Christ”
 - (b) Paul is not using this designation as a proper name.
 - (c) In Romans 16 Paul is sending greetings to the saints at Rome from various Christians he specifically names (~35 names).
 - (d) Then, he simply adds a general greeting from various congregations of unnamed Christians by including the phrase, “...*the churches of Christ salute you.*”
 - (2) In 1 Corinthians 1:2 Paul writes “*unto the church of God which is at Corinth...*”
 - (a) Again, Paul is not using this designation as a proper name.
 - (b) He is simply referring to the Christians who made up the local church meeting in the city of Corinth.
 - (3) The church we read about in the Bible, unlike every denomination, has no proper name!
 - (4) Think! A proper name is needed to distinguish one thing from another in the same class (e.g., **people**: Mike Holsapple vs. Craig Thomas; **countries**: United States of America vs. People’s Republic of China; **denominations**: Lutheran Church vs. Methodist Church).
 - (a) ****** The church we read about in the NT needed no such distinguishing name.

- (b) The NT church was singular, unique, and exclusive; it was without competition from any denomination!
- (c) Because no denominations existed when the NT was written (Eph. 4:4; Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28 Eph. 5:23).

Another distinct element common to every denomination is a...

2. **13** Human head:

- A. Every denomination has a unique human head for denominational guidance and authority.
 - (1) Pope: Roman Catholic Church
 - (2) President: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses
 - (3) Corporate bodies: Boards, Synods, Councils, General Assemblies (all such bodies have delegates or representatives who exercise control over their specific denomination.).
- B. These human leaders determine the *official* doctrine of the denomination; for that denomination alone and no other denomination.
 - (1) Before 1870 there was no decree of papal infallibility on the part of the Roman Catholic Church; what happened?
 - (2) A council of men (Vatican Council) decreed it and to be a Catholic in good standing now one has to believe that the Pope is infallible when speaking "ex-cathedra."
 - (3) ****** How far has the Roman Catholic Church taken their view of the pope?

"The Pope is not only the representative of Jesus Christ, **he is Jesus Christ himself**, hidden under the veil of flesh." *Catholic National*, July 1895.

"We hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty." *Pope Leo XIII Encyclical Letter of June 20, 1894.*
 - (4) ****** Historically, Protestant churches only approved marriage between a man and a woman, but recently many have changed their teachings to approve same-sex marriage.
 - (5) What happened? Their human heads and human legislative bodies changed their "creed."

Psa. 119:89: "Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven."

1 Pet. 1:23: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (KJV)
- C. **14** Furthermore, human "Heads" of denominations die; others are chosen to succeed them.
- D. Such is not the case with the church Jesus built and died for:
 - (1) Jesus is the head:

Eph. 1:20-22: "...he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly (places), 21 far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 22 and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church,"; Matt. 28:18
 - (2) Thus, human heads/human legislative bodies have no authority in Christ's true church:

Eph. 5:23-24: "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."
 - (3) Unlike human heads, Christ will never die or be replaced:

Heb. 7:23-25: “Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

Another distinct element common to every denomination is an...

3. 15 Earthly headquarters:

A. The notion of “headquarters” is really a very simple idea.

(1) “Headquarters” is a compound word (two words joined to make one word):

(a) “head”: leader

(b) “quarters”: lodging (i.e., place of residence)

(2) Thus, a “headquarters” is where the denomination’s head resides, meets, and functions.

(3) It is the site of the administrative center of the denomination. Some examples:

(a) Roman Catholic Church: Rome, Italy

(b) Jehovah’s Witnesses: Brooklyn, NY

(c) Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Salt Lake City, UT

(d) Southern Baptist Church: Nashville, TN

(e) Friends church: Richmond, IN

(f) Church of the Nazarene: Kansas City, MO

(g) United Methodist Church: Chicago, IL

(h) Church of God: Joplin, MO (also Anderson, IN; Cleveland, TN; depending on which “flavor” of the Church of God you prefer!)

B. **16** Since Jesus is “head” of the church (Col. 1:18) He built (Matt. 16:18) and purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

(1) Therefore, the “headquarters” of His church is where Jesus, the head, is located.

(2) Headquarters of Christ’s church is heaven:

Phil. 3:20: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,”

Col. 3:1: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.”

Heb. 1:3: “who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,”

(3) It is from there that we wait for his return in the last day; Christ, the Head of his church, does not reside anywhere on this planet (Jn. 14:1-6; 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Jn. 14:2-3: “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

1 Thess. 4:16-17: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then

we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

- (4) Also, the Lord’s church, in its universal sense, has no work collectively to do, and so it has no organization for such work, and so it needs no earthly headquarters.

Another distinct element common to every denomination is a...

4. **17** Creed:

- A. The word “creed” is from the Latin, *credo*, which means “I believe.”
- (1) *Credo* is the first word in the *Apostles’* and *Nicene Creeds*.
 - (2) A creed is an authoritative formula or summary of a denomination’s religious beliefs.
 - (3) Every denomination has such a formula, or statement, to set forth its salient doctrines or beliefs that are peculiar to it.
 - (4) Different terms are applied to such a statement: manual, discipline, catechism, articles of faith, prayer book, etc., but they are all creeds or statements of dogma.
- B. In Acts 16:4 the Greek word *dogma* (decrees) appears (sometimes used by denominations in an attempt to justify the notion of creeds):
- Acts 16:4:** *“And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees [Gr. dogma] to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.”*
- (1) Here (*dogma*) refers to Acts 15:28, 29 and verse 30 calls it a *letter* or *epistle*.
 - (2) In this case the *letter* was composed by divine inspiration; it was used by the Holy Spirit (v. 28), not as a creed, but to settle the issue troubling the early church:
- Acts 15:5-6:** *“But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.’ 6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.”*
- (3) The creeds of uninspired men are those creeds composed to tell the world what a particular denomination believes and practices.
 - (4) It summarizes the doctrines and practices that make a particular denomination peculiar and distinct from other denominations.
- C. **18** The Lord’s church has no such man-made creed for it has the gospel or teachings of Christ (Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Jn. 9; Gal. 1:6-10), the one faith (Eph. 4:5; Jude 3) of which Jesus is the Author (Rev. 2:13; 14:12).
- (1) The Lord’s church preaches the word (2 Tim. 4:2).
 - (2) Since it is not a denomination, it does not need a creed!
 - (3) The New Testament scriptures form the “*pattern of sound words*” and Christians are commanded to hold to that pattern (2 Tim. 1:13).
 - (4) There is absolutely no need for a creed of human origin.
- D. **Side note:** Liberal brethren accuse us of “*patternism*” for believing the New Testament provides a pattern to follow insofar, for example, the work, worship and organization of the church is concerned.
- (1) They hurl “*patternism*” as an epithet, it’s meant to be derogatory. That is amazing!

- (2) The Scripture tells us we are to hold to the “*pattern of sound words*,” and if we do, we are labeled maliciously as “patternists”?
- (3) I wear that epithet as a badge of honor!

Another distinct element common to every denomination is...

5. **19** Centralized work:

- A. If one drives by a complex called “Such and such Baptist Hospital, or, “such and such Catholic Hospital,” no one rightly thinks that some individual Baptist congregation, or some local Catholic church originated and maintains that hospital.
 - (1) It is a work centralized by the denomination.
 - (2) Every denomination has certain centralized works and the local churches that make up that denomination mainly furnish the funds by which the centralized work is done.
 - (3) Every denomination promotes different kinds of works and they are directed by the leaders of the denomination and they finance this work by mainly gathering funds from the local churches that compose the denomination.
 - (4) I have had surgery performed at a Methodist and Catholic hospital but both represent “centralized works” of those denominations and not works of their local congregations.
- B. Centralized work in the churches of Christ: I Sam. 8:20
 - (1) In the early 1800’s there was much discussion in the brotherhood, pro and con, about the establishment of a Missionary Society as a “means” or “method” of getting the gospel preached to the whole world.
 - (2) Those rightly opposing argued the Missionary Society was not a “means or method,” but rather another organization through which the church universally would be working.
 - (3) October 24, 1849 the *American Christian Missionary Society*, with Alexander Campbell as its first president, was established in Cincinnati, Ohio.
 - (4) Ironically, he was not present when selected and had previously opposed the Missionary Society concept on the grounds of their preempting the role of the local church, and claimed the church should be its own missionary society.
 - (5) Those who opposed it were designated “anti-missionary” brethren.
 - (6) A hundred years later the *sponsoring church* (explain) concept began to be popular, and the pro-Missionary Society brethren began to call those in opposition to the sponsoring church arrangement “antis.”
 - (7) In both cases local churches began to function through man-made organizations.
 - (8) The New Testament knows nothing about a “sponsoring church” with “diocesan” elders over brotherhood projects (sponsoring church analogous to Roman Catholicism).
 - (9) Elders are to be over a local church, not over a “diocese” or a certain territorial jurisdiction, the brotherhood work (**I Pet. 5:2**: “*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you...*”).
 - (10) The Missionary Society and the sponsoring church both represent the activation of the church universal by means of institutionalism and centralization.
 - (11) Fruitless efforts have been made to show a sponsoring church in the Scriptures, but it is not there (e.g., debates; I Pet. 5:2).

- (12) A classic example of the sponsoring church arrangement is the *Herald of Truth*.
- (a) In 1952, Highland Blvd. church in Abilene, TX started the national-network radio program and in 1954 added television.
 - (b) By 1968, 3000 local churches of Christ were donating funds to the Highland Blvd. church to finance the radio and television programs.
 - (c) Their annual budget has been at times in the millions of dollars, yet the argument was being made that a “church in need may be helped by other churches.”
 - (d) A congregation with a 1000 or more in attendance of Sunday morning, and with large contributions each Sunday, is a “church in need?”
 - (e) ** There is no Scripture for churches sending funds to another church for evangelism, but rather churches sent directly to the preacher for his support; no intervening Missionary Society or sponsoring church.
2 Cor. 11:8: “*I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service.*” (KJV)
Phil. 4:15-16: “*Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.*”
 - (f) The churches did not send to any church to sponsor Paul in his preaching! They sent directly to Paul the preacher.
 - (g) The Missionary Society and the sponsoring church are both unscriptural arrangements and stand or fall together; they fall!

III. CONCLUSION: 20

- I. The heart of denominationalism is division (Prov. 6:16-19: “*And one who sows discord among brethren.*”; Jn. 17:20-23).
 - A. God is not the God of confusion, but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33).
 - B. God desires and requires unity, not division.
1 Cor. 1:10: “*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.*”
 - C. Men want “unity in diversity,” (in reality doesn’t exist); **Eph. 4:5:** “*...one faith...*”; Gal. 1:6-9
2 Jn. 9-11: “*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. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.*”
Col. 3:17: “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*”
1 Pet. 4:11: “*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.*”
 - D. Denominational thinking and language has seeped into the Lord’s church:
 - (1) Brethren sometimes express themselves in ways that indicate their thinking is denominational in nature.
 - (2) They speak of the church in denominational language; making the term “Church of Christ” a proper name, which it is not:

- (a) "I am a Baptist," is rejoined with "I am Church of Christ."
 - (b) "What denomination are you?" "I am Church of Christ."
 - (c) Or, a certain magazine is called "a Church of Christ" magazine.
 - (d) Or, a certain school is called "a Church of Christ" school.
- (3) This kind of talk is *"the language of Ashdod"*! Neh. 13:24
- (4) The church we read about in the Bible, the church we claim to belong to is not a denomination; it has no proper name like a denomination!
- (5) I am not a "Church of Christ preacher"! I am simply a preacher of the gospel of Christ! Rom. 1:16-17
2. The church which we read about in the New Testament:
- A. Is singular and built by Jesus Christ: Matt. 16:18
 - B. Is Christ's body, and is singular in nature:
 - Col. 1:18:** *"And he is the head of the body, the church;"*
 - Eph. 4:4:** *"There is one body..."*
 - C. It is where God reconciles man:
 - Col. 1:19-21:** *"For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight..."*
 - D. It is the only group of people Jesus will save:
 - Eph. 5:23:** *"For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body."*
 - Eph. 5:25-27:** *"...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."*
3. Since the Lord will only save His church:
- A. ****** Who wants to live and die in a denomination not once mentioned in the Scriptures?
 - B. The church Jesus built and will save is *"...the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man."* (Heb. 8:2)
 - Matt. 15:13:** *"Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted."*
 - Heb. 3:6:** *"...Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end."*
4. Denominationalism does not serve our Lord; He will tell its followers, *"I never knew you,"* (Matt. 7:21-23). Who wants that? If you're in a denomination; get out while you can!
5. Invitation:

Adapted from an article (*The Five Constituent Elements of Every Denomination*) by Bill Reeves.