

It Is Written

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What Is A Denomination?

By Kent Heaton

A common term used to describe a religious body is the word, "Denomination." In a discussion of religion, someone may ask, "What denomination are you." What they are asking is what organization of faith do you prescribe and follow after. The dictionary helps us understand the meaning of this word and the Bible will show us how this word fits into the plan of God.

The word "denomination" is defined as: "an act of denominating; a class or kind (esp. of units in a system) having a specific name or value (coins or stamps of different denominations); a particular religious body, with a specific name, organization, etc." In the same use of the word we find "denominationalism" defined as: "a devotion to denominational principles or interests; the emphasizing of denominational differences to the point of being narrowly exclusive; sectarianism." The root word from which these words are found is "denominator" which gives an understanding to the nature of denominationalism: "the part of a fraction below the line signifying division that functions as the divisor of the numerator."

Taking these definitions and applying them to religion explains why believers in Christ are not united. If a denomination is a denominator, then a denomination is the part of a fraction below the line of God signifying a spirit of division that functions as the divisor or agent of division of the numerator which is Christ. By its very description, to be part of a denomination is to be part of the division among those who profess to be followers of Christ. Does the Bible approve of denominational concepts in the church?

How many divisions did Jesus die for? "The church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28) How many divisions did Jesus say He was going to build? "I will build My church." (Matthew 16:18) How many bodies are there? "There is one body." (Ephesians 4:4) Since the body is the church - "The church, which is His body." (Ephesians 1:22,23) how many churches are there? Only ONE! Jesus did not die for division. Jesus did not build any denominating churches. Paul affirms there is only one church. One is not a fraction and is not part of a division.

Jesus prayed that His disciples be ONE! John 17:20,21 says, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Paul challenged the Corinthians with this probing question: "Is Christ divided?" The answer is "No, Christ is not divided." Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Corinthians 1:10) There should be no divisions among the believers in Christ.

The Bible condemns division and so condemns denominationalism. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) There is only one way to salvation and the eternal reward. Jesus is the one and only way to salvation. Denominational organizations cannot be part of the oneness found only in Jesus Christ. Matthew 15:13 declares the words of the Son of God: "But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." Denominations will be rooted up because they are not planted by God but by man.

PLACEBO SALVATION

By Steve Klein

Middle age brings with it many heretofore unknown joys -- such as heartburn. My doctor prescribed a popular medication for mine. Reading the package insert that came with the medicine, I was excited to learn that

studies have shown this medication to be over 80% effective in providing relief from heartburn after six weeks of treatment. However, the same studies indicated that a placebo or sugar pill was over 60% effective in curing heartburn over the same period of time. Imagine that! The best medication modern science can provide for heartburn is only 20% more effective than a sugar pill!

Of course, I suspect that the placebo never actually cured anyone's heartburn. But people took it, thinking it was effective medicine, and so either convinced themselves that they were getting better or actually got better on their own. The pill itself did no good; it was just a mind game. The placebo was only capable of directly producing a psychological effect, not a physical one.

There are placebos in the realm of spiritual things, too. These placebos are doctrines and beliefs which people think benefit their souls, but, in fact, have no positive spiritual effect. Now the folks who take spiritual placebos don't see it that way. They insist that they "feel good," and they cite this as evidence that their doctrines and practices are effective. For instance, there are those who say they have been saved by faith only, separate from or before baptism. Of course, the Bible says that we are "justified by works and NOT by faith only" and that baptism also "saves us" (James 2:24; 1 Peter 3:21). But those who have taken the "faith only" placebo feel good, so they will take nothing else. The same is true of those who have taken the "personal salvation experience" placebo. These folks think that Jesus or an angel or the Holy Spirit have miraculously intervened in their lives to save them. Some of these individuals describe personal experiences involving visions or voices which made them "feel good." They cannot explain how a God who "shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34) could save them in this way, and yet fail to miraculously intervene in the lives of millions of other lost souls. Nor can they explain how they KNOW that what they saw or heard in their salvation experience was from God and not from Satan (2 Corinthians 11:14; 1 Timothy 4:1).

What about you? Have you taken God's cure for sin, or are you still swallowing spiritual sugar pills?

THE SADDEST PATH

By Jim Sasser

The saddest path to hell is the one that looks so much like the right one as to appear safe, but it is yet wrong. It leads one on in happy anticipation of heavenly rest and joy, only to dash him upon the rocks of disappointment just beyond the precipice of realization. It is sad because people, good people, spend so much time, energy and work on the way, thinking of heaven and hoping to go there, only to be disappointed at the end. Our hearts ache when we see so many people like those of who Paul spoke. "I bear them witness, that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." Rom. 10:2,3. It is pathetic that so many, many people who are good citizens, excellent neighbors, just fine people in nearly every way you can think of, but have never seriously compared what they believe, how they worship, what church they support, and what name they wear, with the Bible.

It is hard to see a person go on into eternity who has never made any effort to go to heaven and to regret to see him go, because he never awoke to the need of the Savior and the means of being saved. Good men work and worship in human churches and are supporting human doctrines they think are divine, and it all seems right. "But there is a way that seemeth right to man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Proverbs 14:12).

We plead with men not to gullibly believe what we say or what anyone else might say about religious matters, but to "Search the Scriptures, whether these things are so." Acts 17:11. If it be Bible teaching, accept it, regardless of who might have it; if it is not...reject it! "The simple believeth every word; but the prudent man looketh well to his going." Prov. 14:15. "Stand ye in the way and see; ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls; but they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying hearken to the sound of the trumpet; but they said we will not hearken. Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregations, what is among them. Hear O earth; behold I will bring evil upon this people, even fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words." Jer. 6:16-20.