

Can We Be At Peace With Denominations?

Introduction. The answer to the question above is simple, but the issues involved are complex. They are complex, not because truth is difficult, but because truth has been obscured (2 Corinthians 4:4). To a member of a religious denomination, my response might appear bitter or bigoted or both. Therefore, it is essential that this sermon be an explanation and clarification of certain pertinent points and principles.

I. **Who Are The "We"?**

- A. By the term or pronoun "we," I refer to Christians and to that which is designated and described in the New Testament as "churches of Christ." These churches were comprised and composed of saved people (Acts 2:36-47; 11:21-27). They were congregations or groups of the saved in various localities (1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2). They belonged to Christ and were subject to His will and word (Acts 20:28-32).
- B. The churches were not warring factions with diverse, distinct doctrines that characterize modern religious denominationalism. Obviously, Baptist Churches are not established in the Methodist system of faith and Presbyterian doctrine will not be found in a Lutheran Church.
- C. But in the New Testament, the preaching of the apostles made believers who banded together in local units called churches (Acts 9:31; 1 Thessalonians 2:14). They walked according to the same rule and were governed by the same standard, the word of God (1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:15).
- D. "And so were the churches established in the faith" (Acts 16:5). That could not be said of denominationalism. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" does not produce a conflicting, contradictory, confusing cluster of churches (Ephesians 4:5). At least, it did not do so in the New Testament.

II. **What Is The "Peace" Which Is Sought?**

- A. The "peace" denominationalism seeks is a false peace (Jeremiah 6:14). It is a lame attempt to smile and maintain separate quarters. We are supposed to ignore differences and smile big and play up "ecumenical" feelings at Easter services and Christmas. We are not supposed to reject anyone except the narrow-minded "Campbellites."
- B. The peaceful co-existence movement is led by those who have no interest in following the pattern of sound words (2 Timothy 1:13).

The movement's disciples cannot bear the label of being associated and affiliated with what is scoffed and scorned as "Campbellism." So they seek acceptance, as was prophesied (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

- C. Peace overtures with denominationalism often have their origin in an unreal idealism; their result is compromise and their effect is apostasy.
 - 1. Whenever you hear that a band of the Lord's disciples is having "fruitful dialogue" with the Baptists or a Christian Church and that they are moving closer in their views, one can easily guess who has moved!
 - 2. Guess who has to "play down" their convictions on baptism and the music question?
- D. If brethren will surrender the truth, "peace" is possible. Such "peace" is impossible when Christians heed Paul's appeal to warfare (2 Corinthians 10:5).

III. **Who Are The "Denominations"?**

- A. A denomination is a human creation, a man-made church. A religious denomination is a divine abomination. Jesus plainly set forth His teaching on all similar groups of men under the cloak of Christ (Matthew 15:8-9, 13).
- B. Furthermore, the Lord also proclaimed the rightful place of all who would follow religious abomination, no matter how sincere (Matthew 7:21-23).

IV. **What Do The Scriptures Say?**

- A. The clear import and emphasis of the scriptures is that God has never approved of the mixing and mingling of human religion with the divine (Deuteronomy 7:2-6; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Is denominationalism from heaven or from men (Matthew 21:25)? If from men, the conclusion is obvious.
- B. If it can be established that Baptist, Pentecostal, Methodist, or Catholic Churches are of God, then all swords should be beaten into plowshares, but denominations cannot be found in scripture, except in condemnation (1 Corinthians 1:10-15). Where is the commendation of a denomination?
- C. The New Testament is a militant, aggressive piece of literature. Christians are constantly encouraged to "fight," "war," and "wrestle" (1 Timothy 6:12; Ephesians 6:12; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5).
- D. We are told that false teachers must have their mouths stopped (Titus 1:9-13). An evil beast cannot be stopped with a grin. The only recourse is a fight, a war, a wrestling match. It is not always

pretty, but it is what the Lord advocates (1 John 4:1; Revelation 2:2).

Conclusion. There will be peace with denominations when Baptists say they are just Christians and that baptism is essential to salvation. There will be peace when the Methodists lay aside their Discipline. There will be peace when Pentecostals recognize that Pentecost is a Jewish feast day and not a church or an experience. Until then, there is a war on, and if you are not in it, you had better enlist. Basic training is conducted in the book of Acts. It will toughen you and get you ready for combat. If you are squeamish, you might read what the Lord said about being on His side (Matthew 10:34; 12:30). So get your uniform on and stand and fight. Heaven requires it (Ephesians 6:10-18).