



The Tri-Cities Edifier

Volume 8

January 31, 2021

No. 5

The Church We Read About in the Bible

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You don't need a college degree to know that there are many churches in the world today, and that all claim to be the Lord's church. You don't need a PhD to know not all these churches are the same. Even the most casual observer can see that all these churches teach and practice different "doctrines" and/or traditions.

Just stop and think for a minute about this: Is it possible for all these churches, while all claiming to follow Christ and His teaching, to be scripturally right while practicing different doctrines? **No.** Anyone, regardless of their education level, can figure that one out.

Let's think very seriously about the Lord's church as we study our Bibles together today. Get your Bible out and let's study. **The church we read about in the Bible:**

1. Was established (built) by Jesus Christ. Some might say, "I know that!". The significance of this, however, is not realized in the religious world. Just do a little research and you'll find that the churches of today have been founded or started by men and some by women. Jesus said, "*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*" (Matthew 16:18, emp LS). Whose church did Jesus say He was going to build? **His.** Why would anyone want to be a member of a church that was not started by Jesus Christ? Who founded the church you are a member of?

2. Is One in number. "You mean there is just one church?" That's exactly what the Bible says my friend. Notice, "*There is one body...*" (Ephesians 4:4) and Paul explains what the body is, "*And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body*" (Ephesians 1:22-23, emp LS). How much plainer can the Bible be? Paul said there is but one church! "Which one is it?" The one that Jesus built (Matthew 16:18). Someone says, "Well I believe there are a lot of churches that are the Lord's church." Well my friend, you are entitled to believe what you want to, but the Bible still says there is but one church, and that one church is the one that Jesus Christ founded (Psalms 127:1).

3. Is the Saved. The church is a group of saved sinners. The Jews (that had crucified Jesus Christ) on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) heard the Gospel preached (Mark 16:15-16) and when they heard it "*they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 2:37-38). We then learn, "*they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*" (Acts 2:41, 47). The church is not a social club nor recreational center (Romans 14:17), but simply the saved of God and Jesus Christ is its Savior (Eph 5:23).



Is Christ's Church Denominational?

Harold Hancock

God purposed (Ephesians 3:10,11) and Christ promised to build a church (Matthew 16:18). This church began after Jesus died, after the gospel was preached on the Pentecost after His death and when some who heard the gospel were

baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins (Acts 2:37,38,47). God adds those who are saved to His church (Acts 2:47); the church is the redeemed of the Lord.

God purposed only one church and Christ built only one church; all of the saved are a part of the one church. This church is sometimes referred to in scripture as *"the body of Christ"* (Ephesians 1:21,22). We are plainly told, *"There is one body"* (Ephesians 4:4). If we believe the Bible, we must admit that there is one church.

Many think that the one church is denominational. The word *denomination* means "a name or designation, especially one for a class of things" (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary.) In religion, denominations are organized groups of congregations that can be denominated (named) or classified together because they have formed a collective entity. Denominationalism is made up of religious groups such as Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, etc. - religious sects seeking to distinguish themselves from one another by different names because they have different doctrines, practices, and organizations. People espouse denominationalism when they join one of these religious groups, suggest that "one church is as good as another," or encourage people to "join the church of your choice."

Some think that Jesus sanctioned denominations when He said, *"I am the vine, you are the branches"* (John 15:5). They contend that *"the branches"* are different denominations. However, a careful reading of this verse and the verse that follows precludes such an interpretation. Jesus said, *"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. 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"* (John 15:5,6). The pronouns, *"he," "him," "anyone,"* and *"he,"* show that the branches are individual disciples, not denominations. Furthermore, it is unfruitful disciples whom *they gather and throw into the fire, and who are burned."* In this scripture, Jesus did not endorse denominations!

The Bible does speak of *"churches:"* *"the churches had rest"* (Acts 9:31); *"the churches of Christ salute you"* (Rm. 16:16); *"the seven churches which are in Asia"* (Rev.1:4). However, the word *"churches"* in the New Testament never refers to denominations. The word *church* sometimes refers to the saved in a given locality, such as the *"church at Jerusalem"* (Acts 8:1) or *"the church of God at Corinth"* or *"the church of Ephesus"* (Rev. 2:1). In the New Testament, *"churches"* refers to the saved in a plurality of locations. For example, we read, *"then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria"* (Acts 9:31). The same doctrine was taught in all of these churches (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 16:1). Members of these churches all obeyed the same gospel to be saved (Gal. 1:6). These *"churches"* were not denominations. Denominationalism is not taught or approved by the Bible.

There is much that is wrong with denominationalism. Jesus prayed for unity among His believers (Jn. 17:20,21), and Paul condemned division saying that we should all be joined together in the same mind and same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10). Denominationalism thrives on division, different doctrines and names, and is, therefore, wrong. Paul admonished brethren not to call themselves after himself or others because Christ is not divided; it was Christ who was crucified for us, and it is in Christ's name that we are baptized (1 Cor. 1:12,13). We err when we divide and call ourselves after men and points of doctrine as denominations do. In the New Testament, one reads of the church universal (all of the saved) and the local church (the saved in a given locality.) Denominationalism is neither; a denomination is an organization of churches greater than a local church, but less than the universal church. Such organization is foreign to the scripture and cannot be right. Furthermore, denominations often have synods, councils, conferences, etc. that meet to determine their beliefs and practices. This, too, is wrong. We cannot establish church doctrine by vote. Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22); He is the only law-giver. We must look to His scriptures for doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16); they are authoritative and cannot be broken (Jn. 10:35). We should not change them by adding to them nor taking away from them (Rev. 22:18,19; Gal. 1:6-9). We must reject denominationalism and all of its error in favor of the true church and truth.

There is one New Testament church; it belongs to the Lord and is not made up of denominations. When people are saved, the Lord adds them to His church (Acts 2:47), not to a denomination. Christ's church is not denominational.