

What is “Non-Denominational”?

To understand the *non* version, we first need to comprehend *denominational*. To *denominate* simply means “to give a name to.” This sounds easy enough to understand, and even harmless. But think about it a little further, and perhaps a little deeper also...

Why do we need to *give a name to* (and thus *denominate*) the church? “To show the differences between them” might be the answer commonly given, but again, let’s think this through compared to what God says about it. Ephesians 4:4 reads, “*There is one body,*” and the *body* is *the church*, Ephesians 1:22-23. If the church is *one body* as the Scripture says, why should it be *denominated*, that is, have *differences* and wear *names* to delineate them?

“Well, the different denominations don’t all believe the same things.” True. But what does God’s word say about this? “*Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment,*” 1Corinthians 1:10. Furthermore, Ephesians 4:3-6 says there is “*one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all*” just as it said that there is *one body*. So...

How does **one** *Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism*, and *God* produce **many** *denominated bodies*? The answer is simple, but perhaps hard to admit: **One Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God doesn’t** produce many *denominated bodies*- following the thoughts and **words of men does**, see Matthew 15:1-9. God’s Word does not produce division, delineation, or denominating- **not** following God’s Word produces them. The only way we can all *believe, think, and speak* the same things is to rid ourselves of denominational creeds, catechisms, disciplines, and manuals by returning to the Bible alone as our only guide of faith and practice. Adherence to *denominational* (remember what the word means!) *doctrines*, and *associations* based on them, must be abandoned for the “*simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ*” through adherence to the *pure, living, and abiding word of God*, 2Corinthians 11:3 and 1Peter 1:22-23.

Now that we have some concept of *denominational*, what does *non-denominational* mean? It doesn’t mean the acceptance of all denominational members with their denominational doctrines and practices intact. That’s *inter-denominational*. Still yet, many groups who claim to be *non-denominational* are more accurately *inter-denominational* because they endeavor to meld together various beliefs and practices of denominationalism, rather than demanding Bible authority for every belief and practice.

Non-denominational, therefore, means:

- The rejection of any and all *denominational creeds, catechisms, disciplines, or manuals* coupled with an appeal to God’s Word alone as authority for every belief, doctrine, and practice, cf. 1Peter 4:11.
- The rejection of any and all *denominational associations, boards, and governing bodies* of multiple congregations since the New Testament only authorizes *congregational leadership*, cf. 1Peter 5:1-3. No organization *larger than* a local congregation and its leadership is ever mentioned, Acts 14:23. Beyond this, the only “headquarters” is in *heaven*, and “main officer” is *Christ*, Ephesians 1:22-23. Obviously, this makes each local congregation *autonomous* (self-governed) with the Bible as its only law and bylaw.
- The rejection of any and all forms of *denominational worship* and the practice of only means and methods of worship that are found in the New Testament, John 4:23-24.
- The rejection of any and all *denominational programs, ministries, and works*- those not found in, and therefore authorized by, the New Testament. Instead, non-denominational churches will limit themselves to doing the work God prescribes in the New Testament, in the ways and through the means He authorizes, 2John 6-9.
- The rejection of any and all *denominational names and distinctions* not found in the New Testament, cf. Acts 11:26. The *disciples* were simply called “*Christians*”- wearing only the name of Christ, rather than that of any other man or man-made organization (see also Romans 16:16; 1Corinthians 1:2 where “*churches of Christ*” and “*church of God*” were used in the *collective* or *congregational* sense).

If we will believe and do *what* God says, *when* God says, *how* God says, we won’t be any kind of hyphenated Christians (Denominational Name of Choice-Christian), we will simply be faithful “Christians.”

At that, friend, is MORE than enough! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)