

Theological Equipping Class

Denominations

November 17, 2021

Introduction: division and unity in the early church

"In a religiously pluralistic society where tolerance was necessary for political survival, and in view of the bloodshed that dogmatism had caused elsewhere, North American Protestants tended to think of the church as an invisible reality consisting of all true believers, and of the visible churches of 'denominations' as voluntary organizations that believers create and join according to their convictions and preferences." (Justo Gonzalez)

What is a Denomination?

Branches of Christianity

Heterodoxy|heresy

Family traditions

Cults|sects

Denominations

"A denomination is any group of churches, congregations, assemblies, or religious meetings with some affiliation among themselves however formal or informal it may be." (Roger Olson)

What's in a name?

Baptist
Methodist
Presbyterian
Episcopalian

The History and Theology of Denominations

- **First-10th centuries**
- **In 1054, two branches: Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodoxy**
- **1517: birth of Reformation – three branches: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism**
- **16th century: Lutheranism and Reformed Churches**
 - **Lord's supper**
 - **Principles for worship:**
 - **“God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by his Word” (John Calvin)**
 - **“The acceptable way of worshiping the true God, is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures” (Second London Baptist Confession of 1689)**
- **Also in the 16th century Anglicanism emerged as a major tradition or denomination**
- **16th century: Anabaptist tradition**
- **Presbyterian vs. congregationalist**
- **17th century: Baptist tradition**
- **18th century: Methodist tradition**
- **the Episcopalian tradition**
- **Restorationist traditions and denominations**

- 20th century developments

- Pentecostalism
- "mainline denominations" - "seven sisters of American Protestantism" - American Baptist Churches USA, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church
- denominational splits

Why do we Have Denominations? What are its advantages?

- Accountability
- Unified Confession
- Unified Mission
- Theological Precision
- Fellowship
- Mutual Encouragement and Support
- Social Work

What are the disadvantages of denominations?

- the danger of corruption
- can downplay unity in the body
- can create an unhelpful label
- an increased chance of in-fighting and politicking
- can drain resources from mission

Are we a part of a denomination? Why or why not?

- Anglican
- Baptist
- Brethren
- Christian Church
- Church of Christ
- Church of the Nazarene
- Church of the United Brethren in Christ
- Episcopal
- Evangelical
- Lutheran
- Methodist
- Presbyterian
- Pentecostal
- Reformed
- Roman Catholic
- Seventh Day Adventist
- United Methodist
- Wesleyan
- Word of Life