



EFFECT OF DENOMINATIONALISM OF THE CHURCH AND THE NEED FOR UNITY

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Abstract

The church since reformation has undergone dramatic change. It has metamorphosed from one single body into numerous bodies. The church today look more or less as financial institution which was fundamentally metamorphosed based on the motive of these denominationally formed bodies. The word divisions or denominations rightly fit the church. This is because a proper meaning of denomination defined the churches today. These divisions have identified the church/churches with different functions and motives. It has created an avenue for serious competition among church members. This paper identified the various causes of denominationalism; its effect and suggest possible ways of uniting these churches. It also highlighted the need for uniting of the church for which it was founded upon. The causes of division are numerous but one may add that ,the Church was brought into Africa in a fragmented form. It is never the wish of Christ that the church be divided but that all will be one.

Keywords: *Effect, Denominationalism, Church, Need, Unity*

Introduction

Sunday is a day set aside for worship by the Christians. For the purpose of actualizing the good news of grace of God which was offered through His son Jesus Christ. For this, they require a place of worship called church. This is literally associated to a building or an erected structure which is set aside for the purpose of worship. It is believed that biblically, Jesus founded the church

(Matthew 16:18). However, even though at the time of His ministry, Jesus did not establish twelve (12) churches to meet the number of his disciples. Knowing the nature and characteristics of man, Jesus in His prayers, He prayed for the oneness of the church (John 17:21). But today what do we see? Multiple emergence of churches. What we have today is the proliferation of churches all in the name of growth and expansion of Christianity. The situation is disturbing. Does the situation actually indicate that there is increase in the number of Christians? How united are these churches? Are there possibilities to have one united church? We should note, Jesus did not found churches but a church. This paper takes a second look at the factors that cause proliferation of churches and the extent of their unity and suggest possible ways of unifying the church. This is because once the church is unified, the nation will be transformed.

Denominationalism

Though it is outside the scope of this work to discuss the details of the history of denominationalism, a little discuss will be done on the meaning of the word denominationalism.

In religious context, the term denominationalism refers to a religious organization whose congregations are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices (Merian Webster 2011). While denominationalism refers to the devotional practices or interest, it emphasize the denominational differences to the point of being narrowly exclusive. It is the division of one religion into separate groups or schools of thought. Christianity today is divided by denominational interest. Christians are inclined to one denomination. They see other denominations as failures.

Jesus never wished that the church should be divided as it is today, but that all may be one (John 17:21). Again Apostle Paul, like Jesus asked, is Christ divided? He urged Christians to guard against all sorts divisions and not to provide an avenue or factions among themselves but that be united in beliefs and practices (1 Cor. 1:10 – 13). It is worthy of note that true religion is not found in a denomination. One may then ask, why are Christians not contended with one church? Instead search for another denomination believing it can meet their spiritual aspirations. This search divided the church further. Paul cautioned all believers to resist all that can lead to division by asking this question, is Christ divided? Therefore it is expected that Christians should at least honor the words of the master builder of the church. He emphasized this

through Paul when he said that “there is one body to which God has called us out to do all things to remain one and avoid division. Note this, Jesus said, I will build my church (Matthew 16:18). Jesus founded a church not churches. Thus, the church founded by Jesus is now divided making its identity as churches. Some of these churches are not founded on the rock identified by Jesus. But on sand that they easily get blown by even the weakest wind. More churches are formed out of these sand founded motives

A true Christian need to pose and ponder some questions as; why are there so many different denominations? Can't the followers of Jesus learn to get along? What can be done about the religious divisions that exist today? Is it possible for Christians, following Jesus without being a member of any denomination? How can I identify the true church of Christ?

When we go through the Bible, denominationalism though viewed innocently by millions of people, worldwide, is an approach to religion that is not compatible with the New Testament teaching. The Bible statement is clear that God does not want denomination to exist. He wished that the Christians remain as one entity to understand His will in the New Testament and bring our lives in conformity and submit our spirit to that will.

Denominationalism occurs when religious people or groups of individual divide and segregate themselves on the basis of different designation or church affiliation and these groups develops doctrine from the known one.

Why Denominationalism is Bad

While there are no basis in the Bible for division, there are people who try to define and acknowledge that denominationalism is an acceptable medium of spreading the gospel. Some of these arguments are efforts to discount the significance of being religious, suggesting that the differences are not all that great, or that religious division is good for it enables people to find a church that suits them personally these are mere reasons to justify their selfish motives while these motives have no biblical support. They again suggested that it enhance evangelism and growth of the church.

If these suggestions are right, one may also pose a question as despite the growing number of churches, how many were converted from other religions to Christianity?. One will be forced to admit that formation of new denominations is mere migration of people from one church to the other. Therefore their augment is not validated.

There are more arguments to justify that denominationalism is bad with substantial evidence from the Bible. Following are most visible wrongs of the disunity of the church. It is contrary to the prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ regarding the unity of the Church. It is a known fact that Jesus founded one church. Hence, he prayed for the unity of this church to be one (John 17:20 – 23).

In so many places of the scripture arises the opposition against the division of the church. Paul condemned any division and says that Jesus, broke the wall of division by His death (Eph. 2:14 – 16) and that Jesus reconciled man to God in one body.

Division in the church is harmful to the cause of Christ. It stands an obstacle to evangelism. Instead it encourage competition and rivalry among denominations. The proliferation in our era were not only harmful to evangelism but also created an avenue for some founders of these denomination to go extra miles to look for powers to perform miracles or healing and powers prophesying. Several times reports were gathered, some religious leaders of our churches are involved in human mutilation for religious purposes. Such act were done in order to meet the prevailing competitions among churches.

Denominationalism is satanic and out of the scripture. God does not want denominationalism to exist. Where they exist, they are satanic (2 Cor. 2:11) who is the father of division. He uses excuses that look good to human desire to meet up the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:19 – 21). They are all sign of carnality of human nature (1 Cor. 1:10 – 13; 3:3 – 4). Denominationalism opposes the effort of Christ on the cross. Jesus was offered a ransom for the forgiveness of man's sins through one body. Therefore through His death, He broke the wall of division and reconciled man to God in one body. The divisions therefore, work against the efforts of Christ on the cross.

The divisions also make infidels. This is because contradictory teachings comes up in these divided churches. For instance one church teaches that “man is saved by faith alone”, another teaches that faith alone is not enough. Which teaching can the believer hold unto? In addition, division declares God to be a Contradictory Being. Chapters and verses are interpreted differently to meet the desires of a particular denomination. This eventually changes the doctrines of the Bible. The doctrines are manipulated differently based on the reasons for the foundations of the denomination.

Again denominationalism declares God's ways are incomplete and therefore unsatisfactory. These denominations formulated their disciplines, manuals, articles of religions, confessions of faith, and creed. Thereby turning away men from the unadulterated word of God to an acceptance of the doctrine of and commandments of men (Matthew 15:13 – 14).

Another bad side of the denominationalism is that it demand acceptance of other gospels as against others (Gal. 1:6 – 7), meanings are twisted into what they are not. The divided church makes Jesus a polygamist. This is because the church and Christ sustains the relationship of husband and wife (Eph. 5:23). Here Jesus is the husband and the church is the wife, the husband of one wife. But if denominations are bodies of Christ, He then becomes the husband of many wives, which is not acceptable in Christianity.

Other bad side of denominationalism include hatred, hostilities, mistrust, suspicious rivalries, obstacle to evangelism, creation of the spirit of jealousy, commercialization of religion, fear of identity of groups, fear of domination, changes in the doctrines of God, selfishness, frustration of families, communities, inter-church marriages. Upon all it is an obstacle against ecumenical effort by dodging from fear of being cheated for not taking initiative.

Following are additional passage that speaks the evils of denominationalism; Rom 16:17 – 18, 1 Cor. 1:10 – 13, Titus 3:9 – 11, Luke 11:17, Jude 1:16 – 19, Eph. 4:3 – 6, 1 Peter 1:22 – 25, 2 John 1:9 – 11, Mark 3:24 – 26, Col. 3:12 – 15, Prov. 6:16 – 19, Acts 10:34, Matt. 18:15 – 18, 1 John 2:9, 1 Cor. 12:21 – 26, Psalm 133:1 – 3, Prov. 14:12, Acts 5:29, Matt 15:9, Amos 3:3, Luke 12:1 – 59, John 1:7, 1 Cor. 3:1 – 23, John 17:21 – 23, 2 John 1:9, Prov. 6:12 – 14, 1 Cor. 11:18, 3 John 1:9 – 10, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Thess. 2:10 – 12, John 14:5 – 6, Gen. 6:11, Gal. 3:28, Psalms 127:3 – 5, John 10:19, 1 Cor. 5:9 – 13. These Biblical references clearly indicates that denominationalism is bad. Now that facts are known, yet we do have divisions in the church. While the proliferation continues, what then are the life causes of the growth more continuously?

On the whole, denominationalism encourage a "*holier than thou*" attitude, commercialization of religion, fear of losing the identity of the groups, fear of domination by the church, doctrinal differences, intolerant competition, insincerity, fear of loss, personal gain and status leading to unrestricted founding of new churches, ministries and sects.

Denominationalism is disgraceful because believers in Christ are torn apart by ill will and strife feeding upon religious division and worthy to note that it keeps away others from accepting Christ thereby frustrating the prayer of Jesus (John 17:21)

Causes of Disunity

From the days of the reformation which was triggered by Martin Luther, the church continues to metamorphose into different forms. In fact with different names all in the name church, as a result of this disintegration, new forms of religions were formed. They are so addressed as new forms of religion. These so called new churches have come up with new forms of teachings, doctrines, manuals but hiding under the umbrella of Christianity.

Strak in Amos (2003) stated that successful religious organizations of this generation stick their emphasis towards this world and away from the next. However, such a shift will erode the ability of the religious organizations to satisfy the religious needs of the lower classes, this will lead to growing discontent. Eventually the masses will defect to form new religious organizations, a sect where in the original worldliness of the former organization is emphasized.

This statement can be a factor of the causes of denominationalism. True word of God need not to be compromised. What is spelt out, is the basic truth to be taught. Humans are dynamic but the truth about God is unchanged. It is based on these that the human conditions wanted religion to suit his present economic and social desires.

Disagreement over an issue within a church system will lead to formation of sentiments against the leadership of the church. hence will lead to the formation of groups for support and when such is formed an idea of breaking away will come in. disagreement and misunderstandings hurt the feelings of the members who may seek the way out of the main church.

A church may split when the leaders seek to manipulate people and events for their own ends. Sometimes these manipulations will manifest in form of misinterpretation or manipulations of doctrines that are deliberately done and emphasized and used for selfish purposes. Dissatisfied members are likely going to react and seek to form another denomination. There are those who break away just they feel that their old church is conservative and unwilling to move with the prevailing changes. Lack of use of musical instruments and style

of worship may prompt some members to split from the mother church to form another denomination.

Pride, selfishness and desire for leadership are some of the factors that foster division and proliferation of churches (James 4:1 – 3).

Hypocrisy is another factor that caused split of our churches today. Some founders may claim their reason for breaking away a product of hypocrisy from their previous pastor or the church entirely. While the other new founder of a denomination may be hypocritical by making claims of founding a true church and therefore gather people around him (Gal. 5:22).

Whatever might be the cause of split, are not scriptural. We are expected to live in love and sincerity. It is worthy to note that the desire to lead and to own and control the affairs of a church is another key factor to the issue of denominationalism. This is also associated by the desire to control the finance of the church. To make it possible to lead their churches, a lot of political appeals were used to win the membership of the church and to widen the gap of division.

Promoting Unity of the Church and Oneness in the Service

Denominationalism has hampered evangelism. The church need to be united in pursuing its goals, that all should hear the gospel. In summary, references of the Bible, division is unacceptable and the divided church should make a rethink toward unity.

To be one, we ought to act as one. It is worthy to note that, it is important to act according to the word of God. But it is also important to cultivate those attitude which will lead us to be one in concern, sympathy and compassion, attitudes like lowliness and meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, affection, unselfishness, humility, practicing the mind of Christ.

Above all we must strive for love of Christ to be in us all. For love binds everything together in perfect harmony (Col. 3:14). Through which love and unity will be realized. For a united church to be realized, we should eschew love more than truth which will make Christians free and enable them to unite in Jesus and His service (John 15:2, Luke 6:27 – 28). For love have it all. It cast our fears of being united, it cast out bitterness and resentment which prevent obeying God's will and develop in us the attitude of criticizing one another which may lead us to break away.

Now that the church is fragmented into sects, our response to one another should be to forgive one another in kindness and compassion (Eph. 4:32, Col. 3:13) and with commitment to serve one another (1 Peter 4:8 – 11). Once we are

committed to forgive in loving and serving one another, we will see each others differences in a new light and say no to ungodly and worldly passion.

Selfishness is one of those factors that divided the church. Unity demands that, we should avoid selfish ambition or vain conceit. Instead we should be humble and consider others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3).

In many of our churches today, there is focusing off, of Jesus Christ and using the church organization for selfish motives. Where attention and even worship is focused on the founder of the denomination and the congregation, then, the role of Jesus into the church becomes secondary. Everyone in the body of Christ should focus on doing the will of God and on worshipping Jesus Christ in love and humility.

It is therefore recommended that, though separated from one denomination to the other, emphasis should be on teachings of Jesus than doctrines. So that we can have a believing world. We should do that by forgetting our differences in carrying out church project. In our entire evangelical project, there should be no conflict over doctrines but Jesus should be the major doctrine above all other sentimental differences. We should exhibit Biblical unity, which is practice through cooperation.

The church was founded by Christ. For us to have a united church, we should be in Christ by looking unto him. If we must be one, we must not only be in Christ, but we must also be in the church which is His body. The church is one not many. Jesus promised to build only one church (Eph. 4:4), One flock and one shepherd (John 10:16). Those who are in the church are members of or parts of the body of course, one doctrine (1Cor.12:2 ff)

For this unity cannot be sought for, outside the church. It was one body that was nailed to the cross and one body that was raised. When one part of the body is removed from a living human, than it is not a full human but deformed. The church is broken and pretend to be acting independently. Once such is conceived, we ceased to be that church that was founded by Christ.

For a church to live a united body of Christ, we should exhibit a unity based upon God's words (John 17:17). The world will believe the words when it is preached in truth. We should live to accept the same authority as coming from God through His Son. We should as a body of Christ accepts the Bible to be our authoritative guide in our religious services to God Almighty. It is inspired by God and furnishes us with every good works (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The Bible alone contain perfect law of liberty (James 1:25) not liberty of breaking the body anyway, but liberty of unity. Unless we agree on this, we can never be one. The Bible alone is the word of the Father and authority, it is the desire of the Father that we should be one (John 17:21).

The New Testament Christianity is united and agreed on matters of faith. However Christians could differ on questions of opinion but they were all

agreed on the essentials of Christianity. Especially on those issues that required one to become a Christian to work and worship as a Christian in the Lord's church and to live a Christian life.

However, upon all these we should live the unity of correct attitude. Once we are united with Christ through our obedience to Him, and have become a part of His church, our unity must be maintained by proper attitudes. Our attitude towards one another should be that of the word of God without pretense. In the early church believers were truly one. They believed and taught the same things and were in the same one church. We should shun denominational differences. All efforts should be against that can cause division (Eph. 4:2 – 3).

Our attitudes should exhibit honesty in the service and love toward propagation of one Gospel and put all things on love which is the bond of unity (Col. 3:14). Unity is paramount to the growth of the church following for the purpose of emphasis for the desire for the unity of the church.

Sources of Unity

The church was born from one source, one body, one faith and one word. If this is true why are we divided? For us to be truly united in the body and upheld the unity of the church, we must take part in the following;

1. We need to become Christians through faith and obedience by being baptized into Christ for the remission of our sins.
2. You need to be baptized to accept the authority of Christ and His words (Matthew 28:18 – 20).
3. When one believes in Jesus, one need to be baptized and get into Christ (Galatians 3:26 – 28).
4. There should be baptism so that, one can access the one church which Christians are united (1 Cor. 12:13).
5. Baptism is necessary because it is one of the essentials of Christianity which is required by Christ (Mark 16:15 – 16) and it is necessary to have forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38).

We you are baptized after believing in Christ and repenting of your sins, you will be united with Christ and with all who follow him and live an obedience life of living in one flock under Him (Jesus), under the good shepherd of Jesus.

Baptism is the first step to promote Christian unity, because it is founded on the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; the indivisible ones. Once baptized you become partaker of this indivisible body. Unity can be maintained in the church by learning to love your brethren and you can encourage others to become part of this united body of Christ.

Characteristics of a United Church

In concluding this paper, I deem it necessary to identify the qualities of a united church. Therefore, these features are enumerated below with the hope that our

present day divided churches will regroup in an effort to form a united church. Therefore, these features include oneness of heart. That is all members gives their heart to Jesus (Acts 2:37) and strive to have shorter and less frequent business meetings, with a sustained long term pastors. It focus on Jesus (Acts 2:36). This focus makes the members and ministries for non-members and ministries for non-Christians. The unified church clears any uncompromising teachings of God's word from the minds of their member (Psalm 119:9 – 12). This is so done to avoid misinterpretation and consequent division. Therefore, the integrity of the church cannot be compromised. Do not hide the truth to attract people to the church. This is done by expressing the message of Jesus point blank and clearly taught.

The united church always has impact worship. Efforts are made for God's glory. There is high desire to move people to please God and praise Him. There is always desire by the church to give its members the best they want. There is always a passion for the Lord, a heartfelt prayer and making disciples by making love and care penetrating each member. A united church has one goal for outreach and mission with effective stewardship and appropriate programming and vision toward the growth of the church.

On the whole, a united body of Christ are those who repented and are baptized (Acts 2:38). They are those who revive God's promises of salvation through Jesus (Acts 2:39 – 40). It started and continue with people who receive and obey the gospel (Act 2:41). The united church of Christ is a learning and praying church (Acts 2:42). It is a sharing church that live in fellowship (Acts 2:46).

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