



# Foundations of

# FAITH

## Udenominational Christianity

### Lesson 24

One of the great tragedies of our age is that of religious division. It is estimated that there may be as many as 40,000 denominations worldwide professing to follow Christ. Although some people attempt to justify this situation, most religious leaders deplore the condition and some are trying to find a solution. Division is often the cause of seekers after truth turning their backs upon Christ because in the maze of religious confusion they are unable to find the answers to their problems.

Surely Christ is displeased with this situation. Shortly before his crucifixion he prayed to the Father, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:20-21) His prayer for unity cannot be reconciled with religious division.

#### **DENOMINATIONALISM – SYMBOL OF DIVISION.**

Division has caused the present denominational system. In its primary sense, to denominate is to name, and hence a denomination is a name or designation. Yet the term "denomination" is commonly used in the religious sense to denote a sect and it is this meaning which is here employed. Denominationalism is the divided religious system in which various sects calling themselves Christian wear different names, accept different creeds, and often oppose one another while at the same time claiming to have the same basic objectives.

Division can also exist within a congregation as was true in the church at Corinth. Paul warned the Corinthians, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you: but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe. That there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you or were ye baptised in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:10-13) From these verses it is seen that division in Corinth resulted from following men rather than Christ. Paul showed that it was wrong for Christians to follow either Peter or him. If it was then wrong to wear the names of these great apostles, it is fully as wrong for us to follow great men in the twentieth century and to wear their names.

**WHAT IS THE CHURCH?** Any study of Christianity revolves around the nature of the church. In its original sense the Greek word from which our word church has been translated meant "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place," and hence, an assembly. In reference to the body of Christ the word is used in three senses – **(1)** "an assembly of Christians gathered for worship," (I Cor. 14: 19, 35); **(2)** "a company of Christians in a given community or a congregation," (II Thess. 1:1); **(3)** "the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth." (Eph. 1:22, 23) This is the universal sense which

designates those people who have been called out of the world of sin into the kingdom of God.

According to the final definition the church is synonymous with the saved. By definition if one has been saved he is a member of the church, and if one is a member of the church he has been saved, since only those who have been “called out” of sin have had their sins forgiven. But notice – we are now speaking of the church in the undenominational sense, not in the denominational way in which the expression is usually applied. One’s membership in a denomination does not save him, for obviously the mere listing of one’s name upon a church roll does not indicate that that name has also been added to the heavenly roll of the redeemed. The New Testament does not recognise the denominational conception of the church and if we are to comprehend undenominational Christianity we must first clearly understand the way in which “church” is employed in the scriptures.

There is a difference between interdenominationalism and undenominationalism. The first freely sanctions and works with all (or most) denominations. It is not opposed to the denominational system. The second (which is taught in the Bible) denies the right of all human denominations to exist and pleads with all to lay aside their divisive sects that they might be one in Christ Jesus.

### **CAN ONE BE SAVED OUTSIDE THE CHURCH?**

This is a question frequently asked. Before answering it we should notice that the emphasis in apostolic times was not on church membership, but on salvation from sin. Peter did not inform his hearers on Pentecost what to do to be saved. True, when they were saved, they were added to the church, but this was secondary to salvation from sin. Today the stress is usually placed on church membership rather than on remission of sins.

Membership in a human denomination does not entitle one to salvation from sin because such an organisation is without divine authority. If we think of the church in denominational terms one certainly can be saved outside the church. But if we think of the church in the scriptural sense, one cannot be saved outside the church because the church is the saved by definition, just as a dog is an animal by definition and cannot be otherwise.

If one could be saved out of the church several things would be true. It would follow that Christ died

for naught because we are told, “Christ also loved the church, and **gave himself for it**; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” (Eph. 5:25, 26) It would also mean that the person saved outside of the church had another saviour instead of Jesus because we read, “He is the **saviour of the body.**” (Eph. 5:23) We could conclude that one might be saved without the blood of Christ since Paul informs us, “Take heed ... to feed the church of God, **which he hath purchased with his own blood.**” (Acts 20:28) And we might properly presume that one could be saved without first being reconciled to God since the holy writ tells us that Christ died “that he might **reconcile both unto God in one body** by the cross, having slain the enemy thereby.” (Eph. 2:16) But none of these things is possible and, therefore, we are certain that one cannot be saved out of the undenominational church of the Lord.

**HOW WE GET INTO THE CHURCH.** Men often speak of “joining the church.” This expression is foreign to the scriptures. The action by which we get into the church is not ours (as implied by “join the church”) but God’s. We, therefore, read of the first converts on Pentecost that “there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:41) In the same chapter we are told, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” (Acts 2:47) This teaches that when one has been saved the Lord adds him to the church. The Lord will not add one unless he is saved. Then to determine how we get into the church we must first determine how we are saved. This is also explained in Acts 2. These people were first told to “know assuredly” or believe that Jesus was both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:36) When they indicated that they did by crying out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”, Peter replied, “Repent, and be baptised 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 2:38) We conclude that when a believer in Christ repents and is baptised in order to receive the forgiveness of his sins he is saved. At the same time that the Lord saves him, he also adds him to his body, the church.

**WHAT ARE CHURCH MEMBERS CALLED?** The denominational system has produced almost as many names as it has divisions. To some this is unimportant since they ask, “What’s in a name, anyway?” Actually, we all believe that names are very important. Mr. Smith would probably resent others referring to his

wife as “Mrs. Jones.” The church is married to Christ (Eph. 5:23-32) and properly should wear his name. Thus we read, “And the disciples were called **Christians** first in Antioch.” (Acts 11:26) “Yet if any man suffer as a **Christian**, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (I Peter 4:16) It is also proper, of course, to speak of God’s children as disciples, saints, etc. but whenever glory is given, it must be to our saviour, not to man. The word “Christian” gives this glory; the denominational designations do not. Some of them are drawn from the names of reformers, some from a kind of church organisation, some from a church ordinance. But if these names do not have scriptural sanction, it is wrong for followers of Christ to wear them.

It is argued that these names are necessary to distinguish individuals from those of other faiths. This reasoning would be valid if the denominational system itself were right, but since it is without divine authority, so are the denominational names that go along with it. Followers of Christ should be content to call themselves “Christians”, nothing more or less,

without denominational prefix or suffix. Not until this is done can one truly be an undenominational Christian.

**HOW WE CAN BE CHRISTIANS ONLY.** The Christians in the first century were undenominational. To be undenominational Christians we need only to pattern ourselves after the Christianity which they practised. In the New Testament we learn about the church of the first century. If we take this as our guide in every way possible and thus restore New Testament Christianity, we will be Christians only and truly undenominational. By separating ourselves from denominationalism it is just as possible to be undenominational today as in apostolic days. Of course, this necessitates our worshipping with other Christians in a congregation which is truly undenominational. One cannot be undenominational while partaking of denominationism.

In the next lesson we will examine the scriptural basis of Christian unity and will also notice the marks of an undenominational congregation.

#### TEST ON LESSON 24

#### Write true or false after the following statements:

1. Religious division pleases Christ. ....
2. The only difference between denominations is their names. ....
3. It is right to wear the names of such men as great religious reformers. ....
4. In the undenominational sense, the church and the saved are the same. ....
5. The church is composed of those who have been called out of sin. ....
6. Membership in a human denomination will save a person. ....
7. The scriptures approve interdenominationalism. ....
8. On Pentecost, Peter stressed the importance of getting into the church. ....
9. The expression “join the church” is not found in the Bible. ....
10. When one is saved from his sins, the Lord adds him to the church. ....
11. The name Christ’s disciples wear is unimportant. ....

12. One can be an undenominational Christian and still be a member of a denomination. ....

**List four conclusions which could be drawn if one could be saved outside the church:**

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and 3:1-11. Then fill in the blanks:**

By those who were of the household of ..... , Paul had learned that the Corinthian church was guilty of denominationalism. He therefore besought these disciples to all speak the same thing that there might be no ..... among them. He pointed out that some were following ..... , others were following ..... , still other were following ..... , while some were following Christ. Paul did not want them to follow him because he had not been ..... , for them, neither had they been ..... In his name. While Acts 18:8 informs us that many of the Corinthian people had been baptised, Paul with his own hands had baptised only ..... and Gaius and the household of ..... . The others had doubtless been baptised by Paul's co-workers.

Paul could not speak to the Corinthians as spiritual because they were ..... He knew this was so because of envyings and ..... and divisions precipitated by their following such men as Paul and ..... These men were only ..... by whom the disciples had believed. Paul had planted, Apollos had ..... , but the increase came from ..... The only true foundation which is laid is ..... From this we conclude that when we follow men we create division and are guilty of denominationalism.

# Udenominational Christianity

## Lesson 24

### Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

Section 1 – F, F, F, T, T, F, F, F, T, T, F, F.

Section 2 – (Order not important).

1. Christ died for nought.
2. One would have another saviour instead of Christ.
3. One might be saved without the blood of Christ.
4. One could be saved without being reconciled to God.

Section 3 – Chloe, divisions, Paul, Apollos, Cephas, crucified, baptised, Crispus, Stephanas, carnal, strife, Apollos, ministers, watered, God, Christ.

Enquiries to - [graemestudy@gmail.com](mailto:graemestudy@gmail.com)