

The following is another of many topical studies and Biblical Chain References written by Dr. Kent A. Field starting in 1976 to the present day. Do you question the validity of topical studies? Think again! Consider the very purpose of the New Testament Letters. The Book of 1John was a topical study combating Gnosticism; Galatians combats the binding of circumcision; and so on...

DENOMINATIONALISM ?

By Kent A. Field
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How does God feel about religious division? It may not be enough just to say that God doesn't like it. In fact, the Bible may indicate He condemns it. How does He respond to it?.. especially among those who call themselves His followers? Many religious and sincere people really don't think that it makes any difference to God. They say that "we're headed for the same place, we're just taking different roads". They say "we're all serving the same God, just in different ways". But what does God say? Are we left without any clear direction from God in the area of religious unity? What does the Bible say on the matter? How does God really feel about this thing modern man calls denominational Christianity?

A number of important passages are listed here for your prayerful consideration. It is important to understand just what God wants us to learn from these passages. The points made by the passages listed should be quite obvious. However, a few very specific questions are asked which refer back to the verses listed. The answers to all the following questions can be easily found within the verses themselves. Take the time to compare the Bible's answers to how you or others may have otherwise answered. It is very important that your answers to these questions come right out of the Bible alone! Mere thoughts and opinions won't tell us what God has said!

1. John 17:20—23

1. From verse 20, what are we to believe in Jesus through? _____
2. From verse 21, did Jesus pray that His followers would be divided? _____
3. What did Jesus pray for? _____
4. Do you believe God is answering Jesus' prayer? _____
5. Are all of Jesus' true followers "one" in Him? _____
6. Then what does that say about all those who are not "one" in their name, or doctrine, or practice, or confession, or hope? _____

2. 1Cor.1:10;Rom.15:4—6

1. Does God approve of people speaking differing things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? _____
2. Must we all speak the same thing or agree? _____
3. How many divisions may there be among us with God's approval? _____
4. Does God insist that we are all of the same mind or thinking? _____
5. Must we also agree in matters of judgment concerning godliness? _____
6. Are you aware of differing religious groups that speak different things, are not of the same mind, nor does their judgment agree? _____
7. But what does the Bible say? _____

3. 1Cor.1:12—15

1. Is Christ divided? _____
2. Is it wrong to call ourselves after men? _____
3. Would it then be wrong to be a part of a church that is named after a mere man? _____
4. Do you know of any churches that are named after men other than Christ?
5. What does the Bible say about this practice? _____

4. Eph.4:2—6

1. Is it important to God for us to endeavor to keep unity? _____
2. How many bodies are there? _____
3. How many Spirits are there? _____

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4. How many true Gospels are there? _____
5. How many Lords are there? _____
6. How many true faiths are there authorized by God? _ -
7. How many biblically authorized baptisms are there? _
8. How many different bodies, faiths, gospels, and baptisms are there in the religious world today? _____
9. Doesn't each believe they have the right to exist? _____
10. But what does the Bible say? _____

5. Eph.4:11—16

1. Does God expect us to attain to the "unity of the faith"? _____
2. Does growing up in Christ demand a growing together in unity? _____
3. Are crafty men using trickery and deceitful scheming to prevent religious unity and oneness? _____
4. What then produces differing religious doctrines and groups? _____

6. 1Cor.12:12—27

1. How many different bodies can a person be validly baptized into? _____
2. From verse 27, are the different members of Christ's Body whole denominations, or individuals? _____
3. Where does this leave you? _____

7. Eph.2:12—16

1. Did Christ break down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles? _____
2. Are Jews and Gentiles also expected to be unified in Christ? _____
3. Would this teach that there must also be unity among differing races in Christ? _____
4. Do you know of situations where people are spiritually divided along racial lines? _____
5. But what does the Bible say? _____

8. 1Tim.1:3

1. What was Timothy commanded to do here? -
2. Is doctrine an important thing with God? _____
3. Do the many different churches in the world today teach doctrines that are foreign or strange to each other? _____
4. But what does God say about this? _____

9. 1Cor.4:17

1. Did the Apostle Paul teach differing things in different places? _____
2. Must we teach the same things everywhere in every place? _____
3. Aren't you aware of differing things being taught in various places? _ -
4. What does the Bible say about this? _____

10. 1Cor.11:19

1. Does the Bible acknowledge the existence of factions or divisions among those who profess to be members of the church? _____
2. Why does God allow such divisions to exist? _____
3. Does this agree with what some are saying in defence of denominational divisions? _____
4. Do you know of anyone who has defended denominational division, thinking that it doesn't really make any difference? _____

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11. Matt.18:7

1. Does God allow the stumbling stones of division to exist? _____
2. Does this mean He approves of such division? _____
3. What did Jesus say about those through whom these stumbling stones come?

12. Rom.16:17,18

1. How are we supposed to respond to religious people who teach divisive teachings different from those clearly found in the Scriptures? _____
2. Must we always avoid such people? _____
3. Even though they may appear to be sincere and devoted, are such persons really serving Jesus Christ? _____
4. What are these people really servants of? _____
5. What are some of their methods of deception? What do they use to deceive people? _____
6. What kind of people are deceived by such teachers of denominationalism?
7. Have you been a part of these people? _____

13. 1 Cor.10:16—22

1. Is it possible to have God recognize your worship with truly unified Christians while still attempting to worship in some denomination? _____
2. When people give their sacrifice of worship to God in an unapproved or denominational way, to who does God say they are actually sacrificing to? _____
3. To whom have you actually been sacrificing in the past? _____

14. 2 Cor.6:14—18

1. Has a true Christian got anything in common with those who are part of today's denominationalism? _____
2. Are true followers of the Christ permitted to be religiously affiliated with today's denominationalism? _____
3. From verse 17, what is the God ordained action that we must take to be received by God? _____
4. What should now be your course of action? What will you do?

As seen from Scripture, the churches of the New Testament were of the same doctrine and practice! They were all churches of Christ, not some man-made organization based on man-made principles, doctrines, speculations or philosophies!

If we were to break down the word denomination, we would get the following:

DE - to break down or separate (like *de-ice, detach, defrost, etc.*)

NOMIN - to name (for example: "I *nominate* you as president...")

ATION - the act of (for example: *segregation=act of segregating*)

Therefore, the term *denomination* is defined as the act of naming a division or sect: Catholic, Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist, Jehovah's Witness, Lutheran, etc.

During the days of Acts, the only groups that existed were Judaism, Paganism and Christianity-- which is the only valid way to God (*John 14:6*). Today we have Reformed Judaism, Orthodox Judaism, Jew for Jesus, Catholicism, Pentecostalism, Protestantism, and so on. There are over 300 different religious denominations! Where did all these groups come from? Did they originate from God or from man?

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God has made His word clear! He has made His will known to us in regards to religious worship! How does He feel about denominationalism? Does the promise of grace await those who defend and remain part of today's religious confusion and division? If Christ were here today: where would He worship? Would He approve denominations? How about Paul the Apostle? Would he worship with any denomination? What does the Bible say? Remember the words of Christ, "Every plant that My heavenly Father has not planted will be by the roots" *Matthew 15:13* and "...if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into the pit!" *Matthew 15:14*

"Yet a time is coming and now has come when the true worshiper will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth!" *John 4:23-24*

Now what about those sincere religious leaders who would say that it doesn't make any difference what denomination you're a member of? Have you learned anything from this study? Will all of God's true followers strive to enter the "straight gate" by the "narrow way"? Does the promise of grace await those who would defend and remain a part of today's religiously confusing denominationalism? What does the Bible say?