

We need to understand that the word “Denominational” refers to one error. It refers to the error of establishing a governmental organization over multiple congregations and establishing a hierarchy of offices governing more than one church. It is not the catch all for everything that is error. The fact is most denominations believe in Jesus Christ. Is believing in Jesus Christ denominational? Most denominations take the Lord’s Supper. Is taking the Lord’s Supper denominational? The fact that a denomination does something doesn’t make it wrong. The fact that a denomination doesn’t do something doesn’t make it right.

Allow me an illustration. I believe, and the Franklin (Tennessee) church teaches, that a congregation should participate in the Lord’s Supper every Sunday (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20; 16:1–2). Many denominations participate in the Lord’s Supper annually, semiannually, quarterly, or monthly. Do I believe they are practicing something incorrectly? Yes. Is taking the Lord’s Supper quarterly denominational? No. It has nothing to do with the organization of the churches. We must not let the word “denominational” become our catch all word for everything we think is incorrect. That only confuses the issue.

Therefore, if we believe something is unauthorized, we need to demonstrate that from scripture. We cannot simply say, “A denomination does it. That’s denominational.” That is not sound logic but laziness and it is far too common of a mistake.

Wrapping Up

Denominationalism is an unscriptural method of congregational organization. There is nothing in the New Testament that supports the practice. Therefore, we need to understand that we are not part of a denomination. We need to speak and teach clearly about denominationalism. Further, if we think something is wrong, we need to refrain from the lazy argument of “That’s denominational.”



Chiefland Church of Christ

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THINGS ABOVE

“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth”

—[Colossians 3:1–2]—

September 13, 2009  Vol. 5, No. 26

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4 Common Mistakes Christians Make About Denominationalism

By Edwin Crozier

Common Mistake #1: “We’re Church of Christ.”

Regrettably, one of the reasons other folks believe we are part of a denomination is because too many of us act like we are. When we say things like, “We’re church of Christ,” or, “He’s a church of Christ preacher,” or, “Are they church of Christ?” we are using the language of denominationalism. Individuals cannot be “church of Christ.” Rather, Christ’s church is made up of individuals. “Church” represents a collective, therefore an individual cannot be “church of Christ” nor can a preacher be “church of Christ.” We may be members of Christ’s church but we are not Christ’s church.

Think of it this way. Would you ever say, “He’s Christ’s church” or “He’s a Christ’s church preacher”? If you can’t substitute the phrase “Christ’s church” in the sentence you are making

then you can't use the phrase "church of Christ." That is all "church of Christ" means. It is a reference to the church that belongs to Christ.

Of course, some will say, "Oh, but we know what they mean. It's too much trouble to explain." That's right. We know what they mean and they are mistaken. We must not sit idly by and just further their misunderstanding . . . we need to be clear.

Common Mistake #2: That church of Christ is calling itself non-denominational. That's awful.

To be honest, I'm almost amazed I have to deal with this issue. But sadly, one of the reasons folks outside of churches of Christ are accusing us of being a denomination is because too many members think the same thing. I remember hearing a Christian ridicule a congregation because their listing in the phone book was under the heading of "Non-denominational Churches" instead of under "Church of Christ." That is just sad. Perhaps we should consider placing our listing under that same heading if it will eliminate confusion.

Non-denominational is not a bad thing. It is what we teach and practice. Or it should be.

Common Mistake #3: They have to wear the name "church of Christ" to be one of us.

The fact is the New Testament never names Christ's church. It offers descriptions. One description is "churches of Christ" in Romans 16:16. That doesn't mean that was their name. That means Paul was referring to groups of people who belong to Christ. There is also the example of 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 2 Corinthians 1:1 in which Paul described the church as "the church of God which is at Corinth." Why? Because that is what they were. They were the group of people in Corinth that belonged to God. Paul referred to the churches in Galatia as "the churches of Galatia" (Galatians 1:2).

Why? Because that is what they were. Groups of people in Galatia. He referred to the congregation in Thessalonica as "the church of the Thessalonians" (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). Why? Because they were a group of people that were Thessalonians making up that church.

I could go on, but I think you get the point. Sadly, folks accuse us of being a denomination because many among us are thinking and being like the denominations when it comes to our name. We have chosen the name "Franklin Church of Christ" because we want folks to know we are a church belonging to Christ and we meet in Franklin (Tennessee). However, we could just as easily be a church belonging to Christ if our sign read "The Franklin Church of God." We could just as easily be a church belonging to Christ if our sign read "The Church of God in Franklin." We could just as easily be a church belonging to Christ if our sign read "The Franklin Church." We could just as easily be a church belonging to Christ if our sign read, "Christ's Church" or "Christ's Church in Franklin." We could just as easily be a church belonging to Christ if our sign read "Christians assemble here Sunday at 10 AM."

While we certainly need to describe ourselves in biblically accurate ways, we need to realize we are doing more harm than good by acting like the only way to refer to the congregation is the phrase "Franklin Church of Christ."

Common Mistake #4: "That's denominational."

One of the common mistakes members of a church of Christ make about denominationalism is thinking that anything a denomination does is denominational. That is just not true. I don't know how many times I have heard Christians claim something is wrong or shouldn't be done and their sole argument is, "That's denominational." What do they mean? They simply mean a denomination does it.