

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

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The Bible condemns denominationalism in no uncertain terms. Jesus prayed that all his followers should be united. He said, “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 thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (John 17:20-23).

I Corinthians chapters one through four condemns division among God’s people. In chapter one Paul wrote, “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” (v. 10). No divisions are acceptable among those claiming to be Christians, yet denominationalism represents hundreds of diverse bodies, all claiming to be Christians. All Christians are in the same body (Eph. 3:6), walk by the same rule (Phil. 3:16), have the same promise (Heb. 11:8-10), are partakers in the same sufferings (II Cor. 1:6; I Pet. 5:9), have the same spirit of faith (II Cor. 4:13), have the same standard (II Tim. 2:2; John 12:48), and serve the same Savior (Acts 1:11; 2:36). If they do not, they will suffer the same condemnation (Luke 23:40; Rom. 2:1-3).

Denominationalism and those involved in it and supportive of it are deceived and being deceived. The Lord’s teaching on the unity of the believers as set forth above and his atoning death that made it possible are trodden under the feet of those who uphold denominational doctrines. Jesus Christ stated, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). Since the New Testament carries no reference to a Baptist, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, a Catholic, a Lutheran, and so forth, then such denominations are not able to benefit their adherents with the blood of Christ or the remission of their sins. Desperate to derive authority for their existence from the sacred scriptures, denominational devotees do violence to the doctrine of Christ by twisting the scriptures (II Pet. 3:16). Their efforts to establish their own righteousness places them in the same category of ignorance as those mentioned by Paul (Acts 17:30-31; Rom. 10:3), Peter (II Pet. 2:12), and Jude (Jude 10).

Down through the years denominational people have labored in vain to suggest that in John 15:1-10 mention of the vine and the branches refers to Jesus Christ as the vine and denominations as the branches. First, read what Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.”

Next, observe that the false view that Jesus is the vine and denominations are the branches cannot be true. Here is why: Christ is the true vine and his Father is the husbandman. God and Christ are one (John 10:30), therefore, all true believers are one (John 17:20-23; I Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-6; Col. 3:15-16). A study of the passages referenced will prove that true unity is required, and just giving lip service to unity will not be acceptable unto God. Again, here is why: Abiding in Christ can only be accomplished by abiding in his word (John 15:5-7). No denomination has the support and backing of the word of God. The names, creeds, organizations, worship, and practices of denominationalism cannot be found in the word of God. Manuals, such as the **Standard Baptist Manual**, disciplines, such as the **Methodist Discipline**, catechisms, such as the **Confession of Faith**, all exist in flagrant violation of the word of God (Rev. 22:18-19). Therefore, denominations are not abiding in the word of Christ. Again, here is why: The branches bear fruit from the vine, yet the vine, Jesus Christ, established only one church (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4). Most denominational people would be surprised to learn that their church is not more than five hundred years old. All modern denominations sprang out of the “Protestant Reformation” movement that had its beginning on October 31, 1517, when a Roman Catholic priest named Martin Luther nailed his now famous ninety-five theses to the door of the cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany. The Roman Catholic Church which preceded Protestantism is described by Paul as the falling away from the faith that was headed by “the man of sin, the son of perdition” (II Thess. 2:3-12). Therefore, denominations do not emerge from the true vine but

from a corrupt vine such as the one mentioned by Moses in Deuteronomy 32:32-33, “For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps.”

Again, here is why: One vine and many branches representing a variety of divisions would incorporate division into the kingdom of Christ. Yet, Matthew wrote, “And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand” (Matt. 12:25). The kingdom of Christ is an unmovable, eternal kingdom (Heb. 12:28; Dan. 2:44). Therefore, the kingdom of Christ or church of Christ is not divided against itself. Again, here is why: In order to get into Christ one must be baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3; I Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27). Denominations do not baptize a candidate into Christ as the New Testament teaches, for example, for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), by immersion in water (John 3:3-5; Col. 2:12), in the name of the sacred three (Matt. 28:18-20), upon confession of faith in Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10), to be added to the church (Acts 2:47), and to be saved (Mark 16:16; I Pet. 3:21). Therefore, since denominations are not in Christ, then they cannot begin to argue whether or not they are the branches. The fate of the individuals who make up denominationalism is mentioned in John 15:6, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.”