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Recommended Citation

Kelcy, Raymond C., "Undenominational Christianity" (1948). *Stone-Campbell Books*. 276.
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Undenominational Christianity

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I desire to stress the plea being made today by the churches of Christ, a plea for a return to the Bible. We plead for a return to faith in the Bible as the perfect, inspired, word of Jehovah. We plead for a return to the simple New Testament plan of salvation. We plead for a return to the Bible as our only creed. We plead for a return to worship of the church of apostolic times. And we plead for a return to New Testament government and organization of the church. We plead for New Testament Christianity in this twentieth century. In a word, we plead for undenominational Christianity.

Undenominational Christianity seems to be a difficult thing for many people to see. It merely means that people can be Christians, members of the Lord's church, and not be members of any denomination. It seems that most everyone can see that the Christianity revealed in the Bible is undenominational. Everyone can see that Paul, Peter, James, and John — and other people of those early days were Christians and members of the church built by the Lord, and yet were not members of any denomination.

I do not remember ever hearing anyone contend that Paul and Peter were members of a denomination. And yet it is difficult for many to see how that such could be possible and practicable today? If those men could be Christians, members of the church, and not belong to any denomina-

tion, then why can't we today? Paul taught us to follow him to the extent that he followed Christ. Should we not try with all that is in us to be a Christian just like Paul was? And since Paul was a Christian and not a member of a denomination, then shouldn't we be just that?

Sometimes a person asks me, "What are you religiously?" I reply, "I am a Christian." When I answer in this way, he seems to think that I am trying to joke about the matter, that I am trying to evade the question. Yes, it is taken as a mere pun these days to say that one is a plain Christian. And this same person rejoins by saying, "I know, but what **kind** of a Christian are you?" "Well," I reply, "Not any certain kind. Just a Christian in the same sense that people were Christians in apostolic times." "Yes," he says, "But I mean what denomination do you belong to?" I don't belong to any denomination," I reply. Then he looks at me as if he thinks I know absolutely nothing about Christianity.

THE DENOMINATIONAL RIDDLE

"You mean you're not a member of any denomination. Why, surely you must be," "No", I answer, "I have never joined a denomination in my life. I claim to be saved, and it says that the Lord adds those who are saved to the church. I did what we are told we must do to be saved, and therefore, the Lord added me to the church. I have never joined a church. I have never become a member of a denomination. I simply obeyed the Gospel and the Lord added me to the church."

He who reads the simple accounts of conversions recorded in the book of Acts cannot but see that this is exactly the way it happened in New Testament times. And if that is the way it happened then, that is the way it should be today. We do not read of any person in New Testament times joining a denomination. Denominationalism is something unknown to New Testament writers. If we practice Christianity today as it was practiced then, we must be Christians, members of the New Testament church, and not join any denomination. This means undenominational Christianity. Some think they have the idea of undenominational Christianity, when really what they have is interdenominational Christianity. They have an idea that the church is an institution made up of all the denominations. But the church must be separate and apart from denominationalism. It is not interdenominational but it is undenominational.

And that means that members of the church should stay out of all denominations. This is the plea being made by the churches of Christ everywhere today.

We plead for people to become Christians as they did in New Testament times, let the Lord add them to the church, and then not join anything. They should, as Christians, organize themselves into congregations and worship and serve God as Christians. If a group of people hear the Gospel, believe it, turn from their sins in repentance, confess their faith in Christ as the Son of God, and are baptized for the remission of sins, are they not saved? And then if this group decides to meet as Christians and in a congregational capacity worship and serve God, what denomination is that? Why, certainly it is none. Well, that is just exactly what we are pleading for. We ask people to take no denominational creed; that they take Christ as their creed and the New Testament as their only confession of faith. We ask them to submit to no denominational ordinance. We ask them to do only that which the Lord commanded. And we meet together as Christians to worship God.

NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH UNDENOMINATIONAL

My friends, does that make a denomination? If it does, then those people in New Testament times were members of a denomination. What denomination were they members of? I am sure that you do not believe that they were members of a denomination. Then why can't we in the same way do what they did, become what they became, and be what they were? Certainly such is desirable and feasible in this 20th Century.

Probably the main reason so many have a hard time seeing undenominational Christianity is that they have a gross misconception of the church. They do not know what the New Testament church is. They have never caught a vision of it except through denominational glasses. Do you know what the church is? Could you give a good, clear, scriptural definition of the church? If not, then of course, you know nothing about the church. If we do not know what it is, then all of our thinking and reasoning is likely to be erroneous. If we begin with a fallacious premise, then our conclusion is likely to be erroneous.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." And according to his promise, He did build his church. He said that he would build it and he did. Further in the New Testament we read of the church as an existing organism, and we know that the Lord was true to his promise. The church is a New Testament institution. It did not exist in the Old Testament days. Matthew 16:18 is the first instance of the word CHURCH occurring in our Bible. And the first time it was used it was on the lips of our Lord. And the first time it was used it was yet future. However, it was not far in the future, for only a few days after the Lord made this promise, we read in Acts 2:47 that the Lord added to the church daily those that were saved. Certainly the Lord could not have added people to the church if it had not been in existence. But what did the Lord build when he built the church? What kind of an institution is it? It is made of what kind of material? Some speak of a material church house as if it were the church. But certainly the Lord did not build a literal house when he built the church. The church is spoken of as the house of God. 1 Tim, 3:15, But Peter said in 1 Peter 2:5 that Christians are living stones which make up the house of God. So, the church is Christ's spiritual body and he is the head of it. But if the church is made up of human beings, if it is a body of people, then what people compose the church? Of whom is it built? Luke plainly answers that question for us in a Scripture we have already cited in the lesson. Acts 2:47, "And the Lord added to the church daily those that were saved."

ALL THE SAVED COMPOSE CHURCH

The church then is composed of people added to it by the Lord. But what people does he add to the church? This passage says he adds the saved to it. Whom did he add? The saved, Whom besides the saved did he add? Not a single one. How many did he add who were not saved? Not one. He added the saved to the church. Would it not be correct then to say, that the church is an institution made up of saved people? It is that institution made up of saved people over which Christ rules as head from the heavens above. We never hear people in New Testament times asking, "What must I do to get into the church?" but they asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Then when

they knew what to do to be saved they knew what it took to become a church member, for the Lord added those who were saved.

I know that it is a prevalent idea today that a person is saved at one time, and then later, if he pleases, he can join some church. In the minds of most people now, being saved and becoming a church member are two different processes entirely. But this was not true in the days of inspiration. They then became a member of the church at the time they were saved. They were not saved at one time and then later made a church member, but the same process by which they were saved made them members of the church.

Since we are yet under the same New Testament law, it is still true today that when a person is saved the Lord adds him to the church. The New Testament makes clear the plan of salvation. It says that a person after hearing the Gospel must believe in Christ, must repent of sins, must confess Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins. When he does this he is saved. Then since the Lord adds the saved to the church, he adds those who do these things. I do not mean to say that the Lord adds every person who thinks he is saved to the church, but every person who obeys the Gospel plan of salvation and is truly saved in His way.

And yet, the highest conception some have of church membership is membership in a denomination whose church roll is kept by men. We hear such expressions as "They can take my name off their church roll" "Turned out of the church." Etc. We hear preachers talking about opening the doors of the church and receiving people into their church. This is not scriptural talk. Only the Lord can receive people into his church and only He can turn people out of his church. And the membership roll is kept by him in heaven. Whoever you may be and wherever you may be, when you obey the Gospel and are saved, the Lord adds you to his church. We often hear certain individuals say that they think they can be saved without being members of any church. But when we understand what the church is, we can see how erroneous their idea is. It is made up of all the saved. The Lord adds the saved to it. This being true, how could one be saved and prevent the Lord adding him to the church. How could you be saved and stay out of the church?

CONCLUSION

Yes, my friends, the Lord's church is essential. Paul says in Acts 20:28 that he bought it with his blood and that he loved it and gave himself for it. (Eph. 5:25). To belittle the church is to minimize the blood of Christ and to make his death of no consequence. Christ loved the church, it is blood-bought, He is the head of it, He is the foundation of it. He is the door to it, and He is the creed of it. It is made up of redeemed people those of every nation who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

I plead with you to be saved and let the Lord add you to the church. You will find it to be the treasure you have long been seeking and the pearl of great price which is worth more than all earthly treasures.

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