

Congregationalism - Heritage & Future

Class #8 - Denominations
November 11, 2020

Why Join a Denomination?

- 1) It helps to define who and what a local assembly is.
 - a) To say one is a traditional conservative “Lutheran”, or “Presbyterian”, or “Independent Fundamentalist Baptist” is helpful to describe oneself to fellow Christians, the world, and to educate those within.
 - b) To say one has “no tradition” is false, everyone has traditions, and thinking one has no traditions shows either ignorance, confusion or delusion. Something always fills a vacuum, as seen by the wreck of pop-Evangelicalism.
 - c) Saying one is merely “biblical” without any tradition is also false and arrogant.
- 2) Helps in having fellowship beyond the local church.
- 3) Helps in finding a new pastor, missionaries, etc..
- 4) Can help to resolve internal disputes.
- 5) Can aid with the bureaucratic things of a local church.
(Programs, pastor's retirement fund, insurance, legal advice, financial aid.)
- 6) It helps to make decisions and declarations against new problems that will arise in/against the church. (Ex: The social justice / neo-Marxist movement.)
- 7) It enhances the voice of the church when speaking to the world.
- 8) Helps parishioners in finding a church if one is moving or on vacation.
- 9) It helps the local church to practice charity to other churches in need, and allows other churches to practice charity to us.
(Note: That we start with the question “what can a denomination can do for us” is a bit troubling.)
- 10) It is part of our Congregational heritage as witness by sections 15-16 of the Cambridge Platform about “Of the Communion of Churches One With Another” and “Of Synods” and also the Heads of Agreement and Saybrook Platform.
- 11) It is commanded in Scripture.
(To have humble fellowship with other like minded churches.)

Denominations are Biblical

1) **2Corinthians 8:18-24**

- a) Paul has sent with Titus (the “him” in 2Cor 8:18) an unnamed brother who was famous for his service of the Gospel throughout “*all the churches.*” (Note the plural.) 2Cor 8:18
 - i) The famed brother was “*appointed by the churches*” to travel with Paul. He brings accountability with the financial gift they carry with them. 2Cor 8:19 2Cor 8:20-22
 - ii) There are other brethren with Titus who are “*messengers of the churches.*” 2Cor 8:23
 - iii) Finally, Paul commands the Corinthians to prove themselves to these messengers, that Paul's love and boasting of the Corinthians to the messengers is justified. This action is to be shown “*before the churches.*” 2Cor 8:24
- b) How do we, at Second Congregational Church, do this today?
 - i) How do we officially recognize a brother along with the other “churches?”
 - ii) How do we appoint a brother to a special task with the other “churches?”
 - iii) How do we recognize “messengers of the churches?”
 - iv) How do we openly show our piety “before the churches?”
- c) Note, this isn't about the uniqueness of the Apostolic age.
 - i) Nor does it deny congregational government. (That each church has authority on to itself.)
 - ii) But it does affirm the biblical principal that we are part of a universal/catholic church. (“Catholic” just means universal. Protestants believe there is a catholic/universal church because that is what the Bible teaches. We object to a “Roman” Catholic church.)
 - iii) We are commanded to have fellowship like-minded brothers, how do we do this?

2) Note **1John 1:7** – “*but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*”

- a) The “*fellowship with one another*” has several layers of meaning.
- b) First, between Christ and His (universal/catholic) church. 1John 1:6
- c) Second, between the Apostles (whose authority is found today in the Bible) and Christians. 1John 1:5
- d) Finally, between churches, for the epistle is addressed to all Christians, i.e. the universal/catholic church. 1John 2:12-14,19; 3:1; 5:13

3) *Also see:* Matt 16:18; John 13:34-35; Acts 2:38,42,47; 20:28; 22:16; Rom 12:10; 1Cor 12:12-14; Eph 1:22-23; 5:23-25; Col 1:18,24; 2:2; 1Tim 3:15.