

3:15

GOSPEL-CENTERED APOLOGETICS

FAITH

Apologetic Life Group Curriculum

Denominations

Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, ... Lutheran??? All these are Christian, right? In the Christian Faith there are over 40K denominations! Are they all the same? What's the difference?.

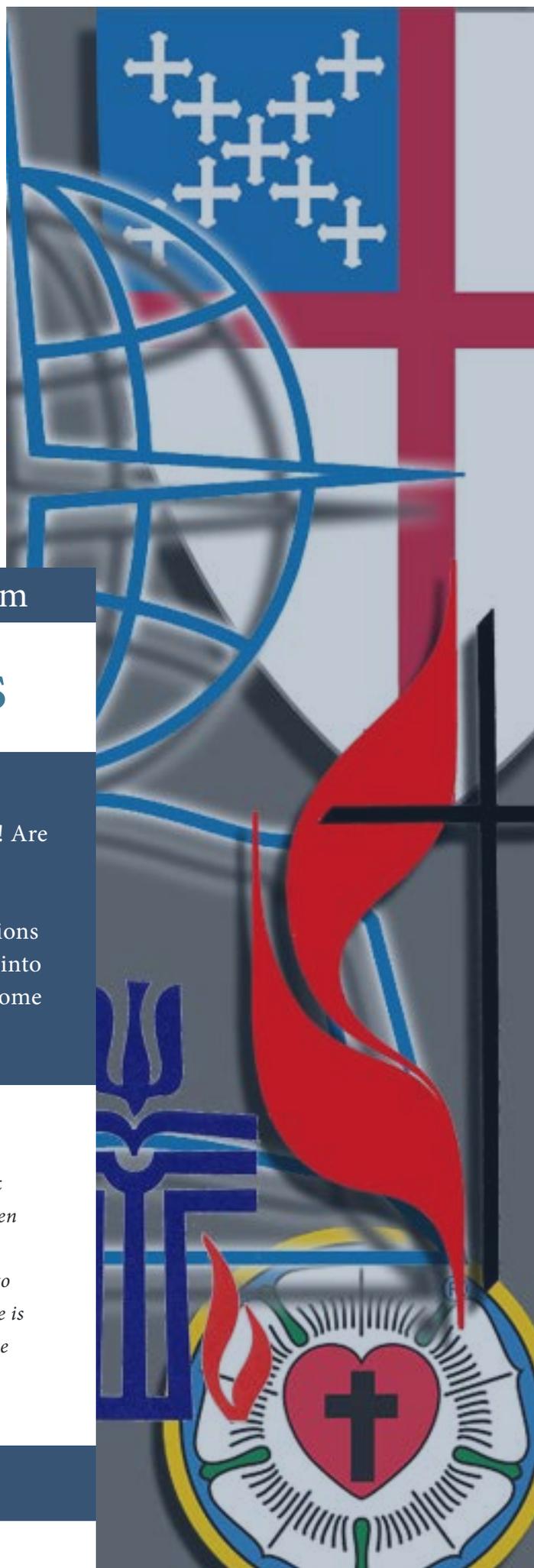
This lesson will look into what exactly denominations are and why the church has them. We'll even look into some of the similarities and differences amongst some of the more common denominations.

Scripture Passage:

"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism,"

Ephesians 4:1-5 (NASB)

written by: Eric Webster



Key Truth

“Our world exists in a state of rejection of God. There will always be differences that inhibit unity. Despite all the differences there is a constant that unites no matter the denomination.”

“That Constant is the TRUTH of the Gospel.”

MAIN DISCUSSION

Today we look into a very common question not only from believers inside the church, but also from the unbeliever looking at Christianity from the outside. Why are there so many denominations?

- How could there be so many churches to choose from when there is only one God and one Bible?
- How does one know which one to attend?
- There are over 40K Christian denominations.
- Are they all correct? Are there ones that are wrong?

Our goal is to draw people to the truth of Christ. This issue of denominations can be confusing and can lead many to lack confidence in the Church. When there appears to be so many versions of “Truth” floating around out there, it is understandable how people can come to the conclusion that none of them are true. It is our responsibility to clear up confusions, correct false accusations, and answer questions where they arise. The division of the church leads folks to assume there must be divisions in the message. So if there are so many different messages, why bother with any of them?

This becomes a bad thing. Which “gospel” should they believe? Folks may feel like, “Even Christians aren’t sure so why should I bother?” We don’t have to be experts in the doctrines of every denomination or religions or all the beliefs of the world, but we can attempt to get the basics down of the beliefs that surround us.

If we can answer why we practice our faith along a certain denomination and how that method differs we gain credibility. We are offering answers and reasons. This clears the cobwebs from the discussion, and more importantly, clears the way for the Gospel.

“And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul’s message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.” Acts 17:11 (NLT)

GOSPEL-CENTERED APOLOGETICS

Not all denominations are bad. We are not discussing a condition where a particular denomination is the “right” one and all others are wrong. The fact is that there are certain local church administration or church governing issues that folks see differently. There are also doctrinal stances that are deal breakers when it comes to Christianity. These have led to differences and the rise of denominations. However, for the most part, a majority see the “Big Deals” the same; salvation through Jesus Christ alone, believer’s baptism, authority of Scripture and possibly a couple more here and there are the norm. If you look long enough you will find churches of all denominations that vary in what they promote and believe.

“Just because it says “Baptist” on the sign does not guarantee anything. Never just take for granted what you hear”

DISCUSSION

Where did “denominations” come from? Well the word denomination actually means a recognized branch of the Christian church. (You’ll also use “denomination” when speaking in regards to the various values of currency) but when we say denomination we are not referring to a different religion, but rather a group of Christians who form a branch of the Christian church. Now if you think about this in terms of Scripture, there aren’t really any denominations. You’re either a follower of Christ or you’re not. So how did all this come about

Well...we will look at two main points in history that got this started.

The first is The Great Schism in 1054 AD.

Pretty much since Christ there had been “the church” It just was. Long story short...there was the eastern church and the western church. The eastern folks decided that the Pope really didn’t have the authority the position claimed over Eastern churches. So, they broke away and formed the “Eastern Orthodox” churches. The Western church held on to the name of Catholic Church. So this was the first major division in the body of Christ following believers. The Second was a **BIG** deal. In 1517. (Martin Luther) broke away from the Catholic Church, protesting lots of beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther wasn’t really looking to start a new church, he was wanting to

Those who protested the catholic church or “**Protestants**” Are the early ancestors of Protestant Christians of today.

reform the church from the areas where he (and others) felt the catholic church had veered away. As a result, though. We ended up getting another “branch” if you will, of Christianity - Then church at this point started splitting over and over for various reasons, some of which we’ll talk about now. Now with over 40K denominations of Christianity we are not going to go over all of them and the various nuances of each. What we can do is try to broadly hit the reason for different denominations and hit a handful of the ones we know and highlight a few of the differences. Christian denominations can differ in many ways, but nearly all of those differences will fall under one of two main categories. Organizational or Doctrinal...

Organizational Issues:

Churches practice various types of “liturgy”. This refers to how they conduct worship. This can refer to their style of praise and worship singing. Whether or not they have a choir or a praise band or even no instruments at all. Some churches do Lord’s Supper (or communion) every Sunday. We do it every quarter (or once every four months). Basically, how do their services proceed.

Liturgy:

Governing:



Some churches have boards that make decisions. Some have elders, while others are directed by a governing body over the entire denomination.

- o Tabernacle Baptist Church has a Pastor and staff, a body of deacons, trustees, committees, and the congregation.
- o Big issues are brought to the Pastor. These are then presented to the Deacons &/or trustees. If needed committees will be formed to investigate an issue or search for a solution. Then the issue will be brought to the congregation for a vote. (An example of this would be the yearly budget.)
- o Tabernacle is part of the Southern Baptist Convention.
- o Tabernacle also has its own church ordinances which have been formed over the years as a set of guidelines which the church follows.

An example would be **alcohol**. To be a leader of the church (for example a teacher, staff member, or choir member you must agree and adhere to total abstinence from alcohol. Is this an overall Christianity rule? No, but it is one that Tabernacle adheres to and has solid reasons for it. This is the topic for a 315 Faith EXTRA (Link for that video is in the description and also in the library)

3:15 Faith - “How Do I Answer That?”

Click the thumbnail or navigate to the address below for our video discussing the nature of some navigating discussions or debates.

http://315faith.com/video_howdoianswerthat.html



Organizational Issues:

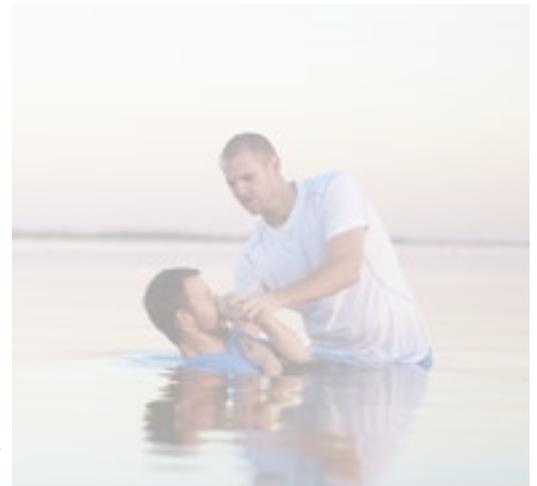
- These are vastly more important than what order the service is presented or even who makes the decisions and votes. These issues are concerning the theological practice of the church.
- Let's look at some of these. I'll describe them based off of our practices here at TBC

Salvation:

One is “saved” only by repentance and faith in Christ Jesus. You cannot lose this salvation. There is no special formula of words to say or actions to perform to initiate salvation. One acknowledges their sin before God, repents of their sin, and begins following Christ as Lord. Some churches view this differently. This is the Gospel and as such is one of the big deals

Baptism:

A public testimony of your new life in Christ. Jesus demonstrated this when He asked John the Baptist to baptize Him. As He did, we are to do also. Being baptized is the first act of obedience for any Christian, (or should be. I was baptized years after I was saved mainly because no one told me I should be. I figured it out on my own years later.) Again, this is an act of obedience and or public testimony...Baptism does not provide salvation or is required for salvation.



Lord's Supper:



(Lord's Supper or Communion): Jesus told the disciples to do this in remembrance of Him. Scripture is pretty clear on the issue of who should partake of the Lord's Supper though, saved followers of Christ. That is considered a “closed table”. Communion is not to be taken lightly and is a very reverent form of worship. Some churches practice “open tables” where anyone can partake. Tabernacle does not limit communion to only TBC members but does warn and request non-Christians to refrain. Also, one's heart should be clear and free from unconfessed sin and the like.

(Laymen terms) To put it plainly, if you ain't got your business taken care of with the Lord, get your heart right or don't take communion. If you're so mad at your neighbor you just can't stand it OR you know you did somebody wrong and need to make it right...get that stuff squared away before you take communion...or wait until you do.

Authority of Scripture:

Scripture is the ultimate authority as it is the direct revelation from God. It is inerrant, It is infallible and It is completely sufficient What's all this mean. The Bible is true and from God. Don't add anything to it or try to make it mean stuff it doesn't say. The things which it says are the things we are to adhere to and practice. There are churches that lessen the authority of scripture and include the decisions of the church or church leaders as having authority

Lets now look a few different denominations and see how they stack up with these issues.

Lutheran:

- Started in the 1500s after Luther broke away from the Catholic Church. - These services are similar to what you would see in a Catholic service. Remember, Luthor "Was" Catholic. He was trying to fix issues he felt were in error. So, the Lutheran church is a variant of Catholicism

Salvation

- Believe a person is saved by faith and grace alone. - This was another point the Luthor disagreed with or "Protested" against the Catholic church. Without getting deep into it here, salvation in Catholicism is significantly more complicated.

Baptism

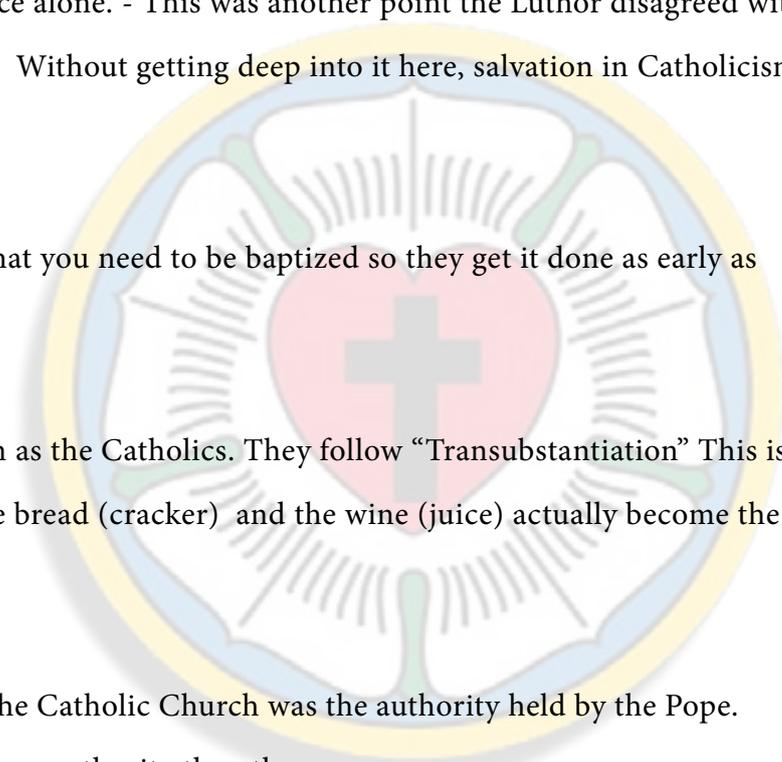
- Follow Infant baptism. The idea here is that you need to be baptized so they get it done as early as possible.

Communion (Lords Supper)

- Believe in a similar deal with communion as the Catholics. They follow "Transubstantiation" This is the belief that upon taking communion the bread (cracker) and the wine (juice) actually become the Flesh and Blood of Christ.

Authority of Scripture

- One of the main issues Luthor had with the Catholic Church was the authority held by the Pope. Luthor elevated the Scriptures as having more authority than the papacy.



Methodist:

Organizational

- 1738 John Wesley - Wanted a more “methodical” Christian life...hence the name “Methodist” - Methodists are all held to the same theology under a governing associational body. - Their pastors are assigned to the church by a denominational organization. For the most part the individual church doesn't have a say in the selection. - Ordains women to the position of pastor.

Salvation

- It gets complicated but in a nutshell Methodist believe you can detach yourself from God or in other words, you can lose your salvation.
- Believe that gaining salvation (or even losing it) is more of a process or a journey. Similar to the doctrine of sanctification...only...different. - Salvation is Mainly up to the individual. God throws it out there and people either take it or not. **Lord's Supper** - Open table – anyone can take Lords Supper.

Authority of Scripture - More focus on tradition and good works - Authority of Scripture slightly less than the other.

The Beat - “How Did We Get All of Our Denominations?”

Click the thumbnail or navigate to the address below
for Allen Par's video on Denominations

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgwZvqw006o>



Presbyterian:

- Originally heavily influenced by John Calvin - Founded by John Knox in the 1500s as well.

Governing:

- The early Presbyterians believed that the church should be governed or ruled by Presbyters or “elders” Elders are male. - All Presbyterian churches are held to the same theology. However, there are (like Baptists) several different branches of Presbyterian.

Salvation: They believe in eternal salvation. You can't lose your salvation. - They believe this is completely the work of God and as such you cannot “undo” it. This also means that your salvation is ultimately God's decision. You do nothing to sway that outcome.

Baptism: Will baptize babies - Pour water over the head or sprinkle water on the person.

Lord's Supper: Closed table or only those who are saved and baptized to take communion.

Baptist:

- John Smyth founded the Baptists in the early 1600s.
- They separated themselves from the church of England, over infant baptism
- Baptists are not under any sort of governing body, meaning that a Baptist church may handle things differently from the Baptist church across town.
- There isn't a set governing body for the Baptists but there are cooperative conventions.
- TBC is a Southern Baptist church. So, we go along with the SBC.
- In a Baptist church, every member has a vote on the issues.

Salvation

- Saved by Faith and Grace alone. - Once saved always saved. - There are Baptists who believe that there is a pre-selected group who will be saved...the "elect" or "predetermination" - There are also Baptists who do not believe that there is an "elect"

Baptism

- Believer's baptism. This means that only professing believers in Christ should be baptized. The act of baptism is preceded by coming to saving grace through Christ, making the baptism the outward testimony of that salvation and the first act of obedience for the new believer. - Baptists do not believe that "sprinkling" or anything other than full immersion satisfied the qualification for baptism.

Lord's Supper

- Practice a "closed table" - Believe the bread and the wine are symbolic in nature.

Authority of Scripture

- Ultimate authority is Scripture. - Sola Scriptura

Pastor Jason - "Denominations?"

Click the thumbnail or navigate to the address below for Pastor Jason's video on Denominations

<https://youtu.be/Nzy6xilad0>



Discussion Points & Question:

- In the Christian Faith there are over 40K denominations!
- Were there always different churches?
 - NO. Until 1054'ish there was A church. Then there was the split that led to the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox church.
- The BIG deal was the Reformation at 1517. (Martin Luther) The “Protestants” broke away from the Church, the Catholic Church. Then church at this point started splitting over and over.
- Most of the denominations are in unity over doctrine such as the Trinity, Authority of Scripture, and Salvation through Jesus Christ, and the Virgin Birth.
- Have you ever attended a Baptist church that was different from Tabernacle? What made it different?
- Have you ever been to a church of another denomination than Baptist? If so what kind of church was it? What was it like?
- When one drives around this area they will see many different types of churches. Growing up I was not exposed to that many and as a result, we had various ideas about what those churches believed or practiced.
- What do you think of when you hear these different belief structures?

Baptist Methodist Non-Denominational Church of Christ Episcopal Pentecostal Lutheran Mennonite
Presbyterian Catholic Adventist

Bible Trivia:

(Question): James is known for his practical guidelines for living as a Christian. He tells believers that we are to be slow to speak, slow to anger and swift to – what?

(Answer): Listen

”This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” - James 1:19-20

3:15 Faith - “Denominations”

Click the thumbnail or navigate to the address below for our video on Denominations.

http://315faith.com/video_denominations.html



Pray

Guide the conversation to a place of prayer. *“Pray for the Lord to change and mold our hearts to see past the differences that don’t matter, to discern among the ones that do, and above all keep Jesus as the focus of our worship. May the Gospel reign above any and all concerns.”*

NOTES: