
Lesson Warmup: (10 minutes)

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

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

Topic Background:

This week we are going to 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?
- Are they all right? Are there ones that are wrong?

There are several reasons that have led to what we now call denominations and we will look at some of those, but first there is a video that I believe can get us up to speed on this subject of denominations fairly quickly. Let's give this a look:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nyzy6xilad0&list=PL0vgax4wIXhCHM3onpS48Y8z_SC0Wv_C_&t=0s&index=5

Ok, that was rather intense. I'd never seen that guy before this video, but he has a pretty good grasp of Christianity and the various churches and denominations. I'm curious how he was a Baptist preacher and a Presbyterian minister as well. He must have an interesting resume.

- Did you catch how he dressed differently according to which group he was discussing? They all have unique personalities and characteristics, but did you also catch what he said at the end of the video?
- What is the TRUTH that unites us?
 - Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for our sins and whosoever believes in Him as Lord and Savior shall not perish but have eternal life.

Scripture Passage: Ephesians 4:1-5 (NASB)

¹Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

LESSON: (20 minutes)

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 truth is the Gospel.”

Apologetic Purpose:

So how could there be an apologetic or gospel related spin on church denominations? First, we need to shift our thinking away from roles and categories. It is easy as a Christian to compartmentalize elements of our faith. We put worship in a box. We put ministry and outreach in a different box. Missions and evangelism will have their own boxes as well. We end up with a shelf full of various boxes, each representing different aspect or particular role of faith. When it is time, we review our boxes and select the one for that day or “season”. This give you religion. We are not interested in that. To fully follow Christ, we cannot divide our attentions and devotions. Everything we do is to be done in a spirit of worship. We are called to “always” be prepared to defend our faith. When is the proper time to minister to someone’s needs or share your testimony? When do you pull that box and spring into action? Being a Christian, an ambassador of Christ is a

mixture of all these “boxes” at all times. Some folks are gifted or tasked to focus more in one area or another, but at no time do we lock the other areas away.

All that being said, 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. 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 see divisions in the message. Which “gospel” should they believe? Folks may feel like, “Even Christians aren’t sure so why bother?” We don’t have to be experts in the doctrines or all the beliefs of the world, but as we saw in an eight-minute video, learning the basics isn’t that difficult. 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, clearing the way for the Gospel.

Introduce the Discussion:

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 – be like the Bereans.

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)

The Main Issues:

Organizational - How they do and handle “church”.

- **Liturgy:** 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. 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.

- **Governing:** Some churches have boards that make decisions. Some have elders, while others are directed by a governing body over the entire denomination.
 - Tabernacle Baptist Church has a Pastor and staff, a body of deacons, trustees, committees, and the congregation.
 - 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.)
 - Tabernacle is part of the Southern Baptist Convention.
 - Tabernacle also has its own 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.

Teacher Note: We will talk about alcohol in greater detail in a later lesson.

Doctrinal

- **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
- Have you had the experience of repenting and placing your trust in Jesus as Lord of your life?
- **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.)
 - Have you made Christ Lord of your life but not been baptized? If not, why not?
- **Lord's Supper (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 suggest non-Christians to refrain.
 - Have you ever taken Lord's Supper (It is more than eating the bread and drinking the juice) One is charged with remembering what Jesus has done and who He is. Also, every believer is forced to deeply search their heart and confess any sin that is hanging around our lives.
- **Authority of Scripture:** Scripture is the ultimate authority as it is the direct revelation from God.
 - There are churches that lesson the authority of scripture and include the decisions of the church or church leaders.

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

Gospel Final Word: (5 minutes)

Gospel Application:

Too often Christians are finding reasons to divide and separate. We should seek unity wherever and whenever possible. The Gospel is the central point which we should rally around. We need to know why a church does baptism one-way verses another. We should understand why communion is done this way at that church verses another way down the street at a different church. Most important,

we need to know why we do what we do the way we do it. If we understand why we worship a certain way we can share that reasoning with others.

There are folks out there holding and sharing views of salvation, baptism, church, and Christ that are not Biblical. Folks are living in false assurance, while others are being condemned unnecessarily. To share the truth, we must also be able to correct and clear confusion.

Questions:

- How can you take what they learned today and minister to others for the Gospel?

And

- What are some practical ways I can apply the gospel truths from this lesson?

Student Final Word:

Each Student is given the opportunity to give a short comment, go around the room and give each student a few moments before ending with the leader.

Pray: (5 Minutes)

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.

Verses for Next Week:

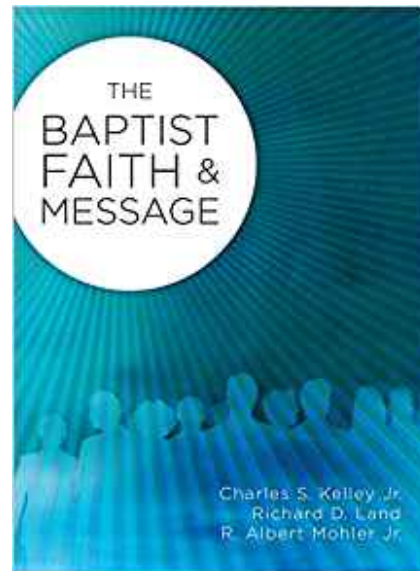
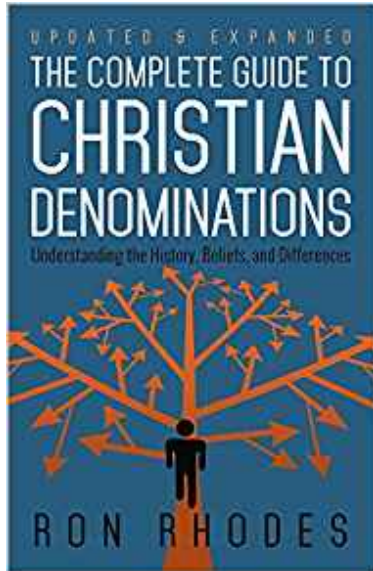
"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." 2nd Corinthians 3:14

Resources:

Online: One Minute Apologist “Why So Many Denominations?”

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mh0j-rIwTjc&list=PLOvgax4wIXhCHM3onpS48Y8z_SC0Wv_C

Written:



- https://www.amazon.com/Complete-Guide-Christian-Denominations-Understanding/dp/0736952918/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1532647354&sr=8-1&keywords=the+complete+guide+to+christian+denominations
- https://www.amazon.com/Baptist-Faith-Message-Charles-Kelley/dp/1415852952/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1532647473&sr=1-1&keywords=the+Baptist+faith+and+message

Supplemental:

- **Baptist** – theology differentiates Baptists. Mainly believer’s baptism. No infant baptisms. The other denominations do infant or child baptisms. Baptists believe that you can’t be baptized until you are saved...you can’t be saved until you understand sin and your need for salvation, Baptist are self-governing. They pretty much are on their own. An exception would be when it comes to Conventions. These conventions will set up rules or covenants to abide by and if you want to be in the Convention you follow those. Once saved always saved. You can find Baptists that believe in Pre-Destination and others that do not. Baptists believe in CLOSED TABLE communion... this means that only believers are to take the Lord’s Supper.
- **Presbyterian** – main difference between them and Baptists is government-they have “elders”. These elders make all the decisions. Baptists allow the entire congregation to vote. Presbyterians are held to a Global association and on overarching theology – Mainly Reformed or Calvinistic. These guys believe that God determines salvation and once saved you can’t lose it.
 - Closed Table
 - Choose their own pastors
- **Methodist**- are part of an association. They are held to a Global theology and even have their pastors “assigned” to them by this association. Completely reject Pre-destination. They believe that salvation is up to Man and you can actually lose this salvation.
 - Methodists have an Open Table