

Non-Denominational Christianity

Over the past several decades, one of the fastest-growing religious movements has been what is commonly called "non-denominational Christianity." Large independent churches have become increasingly popular, often emphasizing contemporary worship and freedom from denominational traditions. Many people are drawn to these churches because they perceive them as offering a more modern and less tradition-bound approach to Christianity.

Ironically, modern "non-denominational" churches have developed their own distinct identities, doctrines, leadership structures, and traditions. Although they reject the denominational labels, they often function much like denominations themselves.

The New Testament describes the church established by Christ (Matthew 16:18). It belonged to Him, not to men, and by its very nature was not a denomination. Those who were part of the Lord's church were simply called "*Christians*" (Acts 11:26), "*disciples*" (Acts 6:1), and "*saints*" (Philippians 1:1). Local congregations were autonomous, each overseen by qualified elders and served by deacons (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1). Their worship consisted of singing, prayer, the Lord's Supper, giving, and the teaching of God's Word (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; Ephesians 5:19). The pattern presented in the New Testament emphasizes Christ as the only head of the church and scripture as its sufficient guide for faith and practice.

The goal should never be to build a church that reflects modern preferences or popular trends. Rather, our aim should be to become like the church we read about in the New Testament, nothing more and nothing less. If we are willing to lay aside human traditions and submit ourselves completely to the authority of Christ, we can enjoy the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:20–21). History has repeatedly shown that when human innovations are introduced into religious practices, division soon follows. Lasting unity cannot be achieved by compromise or by minimizing doctrinal convictions, but by returning to the teachings of God's Word.

Only when we are united in following the pattern revealed in scripture can we experience the unity God intended for the Lord's church. We invite everyone to simply become a Christian and to be part of the church that belongs to Christ, not a denomination established by men, but the church revealed in the New Testament.

- by Josh McCord

Preaching Fear

One of the strange phenomena of our day is the spectacle of religion dropping the appeal to fear while other human interests have picked it up. Just look around. Everybody is preaching fear except the church.

We are being taught to fear everything from AIDS to radon, from the hole in the ozone to the cutting down of the rain forests. We see fear as a good thing - something worthwhile and productive.

We want people to fear except when it comes to religion. Then it becomes a "no, no." We are enjoined to talk exclusively about the love of God. Don't mention the wrath of God. Don't talk about hell. Don't warn the disobedient. So, we are told, don't preach the fear of God.

". . . Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17). Living in fear! It's the right thing to do!

- by John Gibson

The Precious Work of Preaching the Gospel

As we read about the activities of the early church, one truth becomes unmistakably clear: the gospel was preached. The apostles and early Christians understood that they had been entrusted with a message that could change lives and, ultimately, save souls.

The Apostle Paul provides a powerful example of this conviction. He had enjoyed position, education, influence, and respect among his people. Yet when he came to know Christ, he was willing to count those things as loss for the sake of the gospel. He wrote, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

Paul's preaching was not always easy or comfortable. He suffered imprisonment, beatings, rejection, hunger, danger, and persecution because he was determined to proclaim the truth (2 Corinthians 11:23–28. What kept him going? He understood the value of the gospel and the seriousness of the work that had been placed before him. He expressed that sense of responsibility when he said, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

That same precious work continues today. Souls still need the gospel. People still need to hear the truth about sin, salvation, the church, and the hope that is found in Christ.

Some Christians labor in places where their efforts are well known. Others work quietly, faithfully, and with little recognition. Some preach to large audiences; others may spend years teaching a few individuals. Some labor in foreign fields, while others devote themselves to strengthening congregations close to home. The value of the work is not determined by how much attention it receives from men.

Paul reminded the Corinthians, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). And he assured them that such labor "is not in vain in the Lord."

In a world that measures success by money, popularity, position, and recognition, we must remember that God's measurements are different. The faithful proclamation of His Word may never make headlines, but it makes an eternal difference in the lives of men and women.

The preaching of the gospel is truly precious work. Let us appreciate those who faithfully give themselves to it. Let us encourage them, pray for them, and support their efforts. And, most importantly, let us recognize that every Christian has a responsibility to help make the gospel known.

- by Greg Gwin