

Q. Why is the church fragmented into so many denominations?

A. It is estimated that there are over 43,000 Christian denominations worldwide and that by 2025 that will be 55,000. In other words, Christianity is fragmenting more all of the time. Yet Jesus prayed for the unity of His people. Has Jesus failed? Did the Father not grant His prayer? Or are we misunderstanding something about the denominations?

In John 17, Jesus prayed for His disciples and those who would believe on Him through their word, "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are... Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (verses 11, 20-23).

If you search a concordance or Bible software program, you will find that Paul and the other New Testament writers made frequent reference to Christians being of "one body," "one Spirit," and "one mind." Paul told the Corinthians that there "should be no schism in the body" (1 Corinthians 12:25). It should be obvious that Jesus and the disciples considered unity among Christians important. But when we look at the various churches and denominations, we see disunity. Instead of a "unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13) and a "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," we see churches that have in the past actually gone to war against one another, burned each other's members at the stake, and still today have heated disagreements. How can this be?

Applying some logic, there are two possibilities (well, maybe three, as we'll see). Either, despite the fact that this is the church built by Jesus

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and Jesus wants it to be one and His disciples echoed this desire, the church fragmented against Jesus' will. Or, the churches and denominations that we see fragmented are not the church Jesus built and which is to be united. Of course, the first possibility means that somehow things have gone wrong and Jesus has lost control of His church. This is nonsense, as Jesus is God, and God is omnipotent and does not lose control. The second possibility has to be the answer. And yet....

There is a third possibility that is a variation on the second possibility. It is that when we look at a church or a denomination, we are seeing two things. We are seeing the Southern Baptist Association or the Presbyterian Church in America or the Evangelical Free Church or the First Baptist Church on the corner or the Community Church down the street. These institutions are all divided. These we must see as not the church that Jesus built but merely institutions started by men. But at the same time, we are also seeing people. In all of these denominations and churches, there are people. And these people, if they are truly born again Christians (and we must accept that not all of them are), are not divided. They are all members of the one Body of Christ, the *ekklēsia* built by Jesus Christ (see "*Ekklēsia* or Church, Does It Matter?" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/ekklēsia.htm>).

True, these people are individuals who may not even know each other. But they are united; all over the planet, God's people are spiritually united and assembled before Him. They are all in one Body, the Body of Jesus Christ. The institutional churches and denominations they belong to divide them not only physically but also mentally by causing them to focus on what the church or the pastor teaches rather than letting them discover without prejudice what the pure Word of God says. This is what Paul calls in Ephesians 4:14, being "children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

So, when we look at the world of Christianity that men have created, we see it fragmented. But when we look at born again Christians from God's point of view, we see them assembled together before Him as the one *ekklēsia* built by Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul exhorts his readers to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1b-3). This does not mean we should be naïve and gullibly accept false teachings that even brethren may espouse

because they themselves are deceived. But it does mean that we should be aware that among those called and regenerated by God there truly is "one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Ephesians 4:4-7).

Peter Ditzel