

I. INTRODUCTION TO DENOMINATIONS

- A. Purpose of the class
 - 1. To familiarize students with basic facts about the most popular “mainstream” Christian denominations – their origin and history, founder(s), and doctrinal position
 - 2. To understand the differences between various denominational positions and the Bible
 - 3. To build a personal foundation against ecumenism, inter-denominationalism, and non-denominationalism
 - 4. To better understand how to witness to members of various denominational groups
- B. Material to be covered
 - 1. Study of several Christian denominations that are most popular in the U. S. today
 - a. Methodist
 - b. Lutheran
 - c. Presbyterian
 - d. Episcopal
 - e. Baptist (Southern)
 - f. Nazarene
 - g. Assembly of God
 - h. Congregationalist
 - 2. This will not include the cults, new age groups, and non-Christian sects
 - a. Catholics, JW’s, SDA, Mormons, etc. will be excluded
 - b. Jewish, Eastern Religions, Muslims, etc. will also be excluded
 - 3. Priority will be give to those groups that have, at one time or another, preached the truth as regards salvation (for the most part).
 - 4. Most of the groups with which we are interested are reformation churches such as the Presbyterians, or are connected with the Catholic church thru the Church of England such as the Methodists.
- C. The meaning of the word “denomination”
 - 1. The dictionary definition of this word as it relates to religion is, “*A large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy.*”
 - a. Notice the concept that these churches are organized into a “hierarchy”
 - b. Notice the presence of a large group as an aspect of being a denomination
 - 2. Most of the ideas that people have about “denominations” come from a secular frame of mind which is not dependent upon scriptural truth.
 - a. They do not worry about whether or not they are a cult
 - b. They disregard the fact that many teach a false gospel or no gospel at all
 - c. Rather than haggle over interpretation of the Bible, they assume that everyone has a bit of right and a bit of wrong in their belief system
 - 3. When you review statistics collected about denominations in the U. S. etc. you find that they mix Catholics, Cults, and non-Christian groups
 - 4. *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* defines “denomination” as, “a class or collection of individuals who are called by the same name . . . like a religious denomination.”
 - a. The root of the word has to do with being named or called something.
- D. Using the acceptable definition that denomination is “a religious group with a name” . . .
 - 1. Non-denominational means, “I don’t want to be identified; I don’t want a name.”
 - 2. Inter-denominational means, “I have lots of names” or “any name will do” or “guess who I really am.”
 - 3. Denominational means, “I have a name, and I accept that name and what it means” or “I am not afraid for you to know who I am and who I am not.”
- E. Being “non” or “inter” denominational are simply various forms of compromise (not taking a stand for certain things).
- F. In the Bible, and usually in life, names do more than label – they describe something.
 - 1. Computer’s compute; waiters wait, teachers teach, etc.
 - 2. In the Bible, “Jesus” means, “Jehovah Saves”; “Christ” means, “Messiah” or “Anointed” and “Jehovah” means, “self existent one.”

3. In religion, "Catholic Church" means, "Universal Church", "Lutheran" means, "one who follows the tenets or teachings of Luther."

II. WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

- A. Some people believe that, as long as you get saved, nothing else matters very much – Then, why is most of the New Testament about doctrine, and not about salvation?
- B. Almost every denomination that once had a form of the gospel, now is apostate and preaching no gospel at all.
- C. What does the Bible say about "good doctrine"?
 1. 2 John 1:9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.
 2. Titus 2:7 In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness,
 3. Titus 1:9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.
 4. 2 Tim 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears

III. LARGEST DENOMINATIONS IN THE U. S. IN THE 2000's (2010 report)

- A. The American Religious Data Archive has reports on denominational following in the U.S. which include dated surveys (site at www.thearda.com). These are very detailed and interesting.
- B. The largest US denominations (excluding cults, Catholics, non-denominational and Jewish sects)
 1. Southern Baptists – 19.9 million; 50,800 congregations (shrinking)
 2. United Methodists – 9.8 million; 33,300 congregations (shrinking)
 3. Evangelical Lutherans (ELCA) – 4.2 million; 9,800 congregations (shrinking)
 4. Assemblies of God – 2.9 million, 12,200 congregations (growing)
 5. Presbyterian Churches USA – 2.4 million; 10,400 congregations (shrinking)
 6. Lutheran - Missouri Synod – 2.3 million, 6,000 congregations
 7. Episcopal – 1.9 million; 6,800 congregations (shrinking)
 8. National Baptist Convention – 1.9 million; 3,500 congregations
 9. Church of Christ – 1.6 million; 12,600 congregations (shrinking)
- C. The Roman Catholic church is the largest group with 59 million adherents and 20,600 congregations (the Catholics are behind the SBC, non-denominational and United Methodists in number of congregations).
 1. The fact that the Catholics misrepresent their actual numbers is clear when you divide the number of congregations into the number of members. They claim that their average congregation has over 2,800 members. This is ludicrous.
 2. Catholics baptize eight day old babies, and call the Catholics for life.
- D. It is also estimated that there are over 2.6 million Muslims in the U.S. This is a million more than the number from the late 1990's.
- E. In dividing the groups into segments, the A.R.D.A. makes the numbers a bit more difficult to analyze (i.e. the split Lutherans into two groups)
 1. Charismatic groups are a collection of many small groups
 2. Often, these divisions are more political than doctrinal
- F. There are about 150 million people in the U.S. that belong to no group. About half the population.
- G. The number of Americans who are saved is less than ten percent of the country (and this is optimistic).
- H. Most of the larger denominations that did or do preach the gospel are Protestant groups (those the left the Catholic church during the Reformation).
- I. Three of the top twelve groups named by ARDA are cults, or non-Christian groups.