



# A True Denomina- tionalism

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DENOMINATIONAL SERIES

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This is one of a series of twelve brief tracts presenting various arguments for Baptist doctrines and practices.

¶ This series, in sets of fifteen copies of each tract, will be sent free to Southern Baptist pastors on application or quantities of selected tracts can be had on request.

If this tract is found to be helpful we shall be glad to hear of it.

# A True Denominationalism

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THE purpose of this paper is to show that there is a true and worthy denominationalism, and also to indicate what should be the aim of a loyalty to the beliefs and work of the denomination. A member of a Baptist church ought to know what Baptists believe, what they are trying to do, and how they are trying to do it. This knowledge ought to become the keen edge of his efficiency as a church member.

## SOME REASONS FOR DENOMINATIONAL LOYALTY

1. The fundamental reason for denominational loyalty is found in our fundamental principle. There are various ways of stating the fundamental Baptist principle. For practical purposes the best form of the statement is that it is obedience to Jesus Christ. This is the plumb line for us which keeps the building of the wall on the right line; the ballast which holds the ship in an upright position.

Obedience to Christ is personal. Proxy

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obedience is not obedience. Hence every man should read and interpret the Scriptures for himself.

Hence a Baptist cannot accept infant baptism, which is proxy and not personal obedience. Hence he also rejects priests, bishops, and ecclesiastical courts. They are forms of proxy obedience. Hence our doctrine of democracy and self-government in the church.

Our view of the ordinances is determined by the principle of obedience to Jesus Christ. So, also, our view of missions and all Christian enterprises.

In the Bible we find the will of Christ expressed. The principle of obedience to Christ leads us, therefore, to accept the teachings of the Bible as our rule of faith and practice.

All these things belong to the priceless heritage of spiritual truth which has come to us. We must preserve it and perpetuate it. Our denominationalism is based upon it.

The world needs these principles today, and it is for us to hold them as a sacred trust for all mankind.



2. Again, denominational loyalty makes for denominational efficiency, and denominational efficiency is the highest known form of organized Christian efficiency. Efficient people are those united by common convictions, common purposes, and organized for common ends. Conviction, deep and strong, is a psychological necessity for real efficiency. Conviction is like the grip of the hand on a tool

one uses. Unless the grip is firm, the tool falls from the hand, or makes no impression on the material to which it is applied.

Christian history shows that the denominational group, in so far as it has been united and strong in a common organization and purposes, has been the most effective means for spreading Christianity. Multiplicity of denominations is not the ideal. It is hoped the time will come when all will unite in obedience to the revealed will of Christ. But the unifying power of common convictions will still be needed when all are in one organization.



3. A third reason for denominational loyalty is that an intelligent Baptist cannot accept the set of doctrines held by any other body of Christians in the world today. If another denomination holds to sacramental salvation, priesthoods, and prelacies; or if it holds to infant baptism, or rejects the New Testament teaching as to immersion and as to a regenerate church membership, a Baptist is debarred from accepting these beliefs, since they are against his own fundamental conviction as to the revealed will of Christ which is set forth in the New Testament.



The effort for Christian union is most desirable if conducted along wise lines. But it would be fatal blindness on the part of Christians generally to imagine that any kind of mere external union would prove successful.

Union on a basis of compromise would be morally wrong. No man can be asked to surrender a conscientious conviction to secure any kind of a desired end. There is no Christian way of carrying on a barter and trade in moral principles.

For a Christian to admit that Christ requires a particular act, and then declare that it does not matter whether this act is performed or not, is to betray a woeful lack of appreciation of what Christianity means. Christian union on a basis of common conviction, a common obedience to Christ, will be the only enduring form of union.



It follows from what has been said that an intelligently loyal Baptist is one who knows the reasons for the faith that is in him and holds that faith as a clear teaching of the New Testament. A Baptist who is a Baptist merely because his parents were Baptists, or because it is more convenient or agreeable, or profitable in a social or business way to be a Baptist, has not yet found the highest motive for his allegiance. He needs to obtain a clear view of the great principles which are the basis of his denominationalism. He needs to acquire a strong sense of the value of these principles to the world, and a consciousness of having a mission to make them known. A man must have a profound denominational self-respect if he is to do his best work in the world.

IN OUR DAY SOME OBJECTIONS ARE MADE TO  
DENOMINATIONALISM OF ANY KIND

1. There are a number of these objections which men urge against denominationalism. One is the alleged waste of money in reduplicating efforts in a given community. A half dozen churches in a small town, a half dozen pastors, a half dozen salaries are said to be too many for Christian service.

There are situations where this may be granted. And no one should insist on this number of churches who can conscientiously avoid doing so. All bodies which can conscientiously unite should do so. Baptists are under obligations here as well as others.

But no Baptist can unite, for example, with bodies who practice infant baptism, or deny the necessity for a regenerate church membership. I would not prescribe a course of conduct for other denominations save on the general principle named above. Let all such organizations unite which can do so without violation of the principle of obedience to Christ.

We must remember, moreover, that financial considerations can never weigh against moral and spiritual principles. We should save our consciences first, not our money.



2. Another alleged objection is that it indicates a narrow spirit for Baptists to stand apart from other Christians. "Baptist exclusiveness is hurtful," it is said. The reply

is that a man does not cease to be a Christian gentleman in becoming a loyal Baptist. On the contrary, every impulse to courtesy and consideration of others is stirred by his Baptist loyalty if a man really understands what it means.

All denominations are "exclusive" in the sense that they hold their own doctrinal views, their own form of organization, their own worship and church life, and maintain them. Baptists respect and honor all of them for their devotion to their ideals of right.

Baptists have ever insisted on religious liberty. Their alleged exclusiveness is simply the free exercise of their liberty in Christ, a liberty they recognize and approve in their brethren of other names.



3. Another objection frequently heard is that the divisions of modern Christendom are hurtful to the cause of Christ. This implies that every denomination should therefore be abolished. Undoubtedly it is true that a divided Christendom has many disadvantages. But other conditions might be worse. All should pray for unity of faith. All should strive for it.

But as between a divided Christendom where the divisions are based on conviction, born of a desire to obey Christ, and an artificial unity based merely on a desire that all should belong to one church, the intelligent Baptist will not hesitate. Better many de-



nominations of conscientious people than one great organization of indifferent people.

Artificial union on a wrong basis would inevitably lead to new divisions. For just as soon as some man, or group of men, came to feel that the organization failed of doing the will of Christ at certain points, there would arise a new Protestant movement and new divisions.

#### OUR ATTITUDE TO OTHER DENOMINATIONS

The basis of a Baptist's attitude toward Christians of other names is mutual respect to convictions held honestly by both parties. This also determines the limits of co-operative Christian work. There are many forms of general effort in which Baptists may co-operate with Christians of other names without any compromise of principle. As Baptists we need to recognize this. Otherwise, we are in danger of going to an extreme in one of two possible ways: some will lose patience with all denominationalism and say that Baptist beliefs should be ignored in order to make way for fraternity and union. This is disastrous whenever it occurs. On the other hand, some will treat Christians of other names as heathen and publicans, and have no dealings with them. This is also disastrous.



Baptists are not Ishmaelites with their hands against all other Christians. They are

rather a great body of men and women who desire supremely to do the will of Christ. They love and honor their brethren of other denominations and are trying to show them certain great truths fundamental to Christianity in its pure form. But they gladly welcome Christian fellowship with men and women of all names, and seek to co-operate with them for common ends where this can be done without violation of their own sense of obligation to Christ.

#### A TRUE DENOMINATIONALISM

A true denominationalism therefore will include loyalty to Christ and his commandments as a sacred duty, without compromise, respecting, but not yielding to the views of others for expediency's sake.

A true denominationalism will desire to have part in the great enterprises of those who share in a common New Testament faith and practice, and will include loyalty to the brethren who hold this common faith, with a desire that all men may come to know the truth of God. We must not permit our Baptist brethren to bear all the burdens and responsibilities of our general work without our aid if we ourselves expect to be regarded as loyal Baptists.

A true denominationalism will also include love for all who have faith in Jesus the Lord, and a willingness to work together in advancing the interests of the kingdom of God

on earth with Christians of other names, when this can be done without impairing Baptist efficiency and the violation of the Baptist conscience.

