

- e. Denominations vss. Denominationalism
- (1) To "denominate" means "to give a name to" in order to distinguish one thing from another, or in order to differentiate a thing with one set of characteristics from one with another.
 - (2) Although the term "denomination" can apply to various groups that go by the name "Christian" (such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches), usually when we use the term we think of Protestant denominations.
 - (3) Protestant denominations are groups of professing Christian churches that are distinctive in history, beliefs, structure, or practices.
 - (4) The Bible speaks both of the universal Body of Christ and of local churches. All Christians in a certain geographical area might be called part of the Body of Christ, as might all Christian churches.
 - (5) In a sinful world imperfect Christians marked by noetic effects of sin understand the Scriptures differently. There is little point in saying that they ought not to do so; they simply do! The exercise of the right of private interpretation (given the effects of sin upon the understanding) virtually guarantees that Christians will formulate differing doctrines and doctrinal systems. Without an infallible authority to decide between formulations, Christians must learn to live and work with these differences.
 - (6) If 200 Christians move into a newly-built residential area, discover each other, and meet together to see if a local church can be organized; and if 150 believe in unconditional election and 50 in conditional election, should the 50 give up their belief in favor of the 150? Should the majority decide what beliefs the church (and thus the minority) can or should practice? There is nothing in Scripture that teaches that all Christians in one geographical area should come together and determine what all of them will believe. The doctrinal beliefs of a local church are not decided by vote, but by the shared convictions of its members.
 - (7) These three factors -- (a) the evident will of God for believers to form local churches; (b) the right and necessity of believers to hold to and practice their convictions; and (c) the unfeasibility of local churches holding to and exercising contradictory beliefs and practices in an orderly and efficient manner -- lead to the formation of distinct local churches and denominations.
 - (8) Thus, although denominations grow out of man's general sinfulness, they are not in themselves sinful (unless they grow out of specifically sinful attitudes and actions). Denominations are an expediency, a way to carry out the work of God through organizations of local churches. Although our present denominational system is without specific scriptural command, it is not contrary to any