

A scenic view of a rocky mountain peak under a cloudy sky. The foreground shows jagged, dark grey rocks. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a sky with soft, white clouds. The overall tone is serene and majestic.

STUBBORNLY

NON-DENOMINATIONAL

THE PROBLEM WITH DENOMINATIONS

The Lord prayed for unity in John 17:20-21. This would be based on the authority given to the apostles to build up His church (Matt. 16:18-19). According to Ephesians 4:1-6, there is only one church. So, how do we explain 30-40,000 different Christian denominations? Is the Church of Christ just one of them? And do we have an answer to that tired old question, "So, do you think you're the only ones going to heaven?"



1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-13

- Perhaps the root cause of denominationalism is devotion to a person, a set of ideas, or a tradition. Because we *like* something a certain way, our preference and allegiance supersede truth. This isn't to say the choice is always a conscious one – we must all guard against the power of our preferences and preconceptions.
- It is intriguing that one can be just as denominational by claiming to be “of Christ” as anybody else. Paul seems to be indicating that some were invoking the name of Christ, not out of sincere devotion to Him, but because He was a convenient and powerful prop in the denominational drama in Corinth.
- “Has Christ been divided?” Indeed! There is one church as surely as there is one Lord. All the saints are members of the one body (1 Cor. 12:12f). All will be in the same heavenly home, too!

“SO HOW DO I PICK THE RIGHT ONE?”

- Sometimes it seems as if all the denominations are part of some religious beauty pageant and the biggest loser is all of us!
- Denominationalism only exists because so few truly understand the nature of the gospel. Nobody is saved by picking the right denomination. Attendance, the form of our worship, having the right "name" on the building, adhering to the right doctrines – none of these things save, since salvation is a "free gift" (Rom. 6:23). I can never be good enough to earn salvation, but I receive it when I am made a part of God's church through obedience to the gospel message.
- God adds people to His church (Acts 2:47). He gives salvation to whomever He wishes (Rom. 9:14-16) and we are fortunate to know the Way of grace and mercy through the word (Col. 1:4-6).



THE SIMPLE ANSWER IS THAT
NO DENOMINATION IS THE
RIGHT ONE

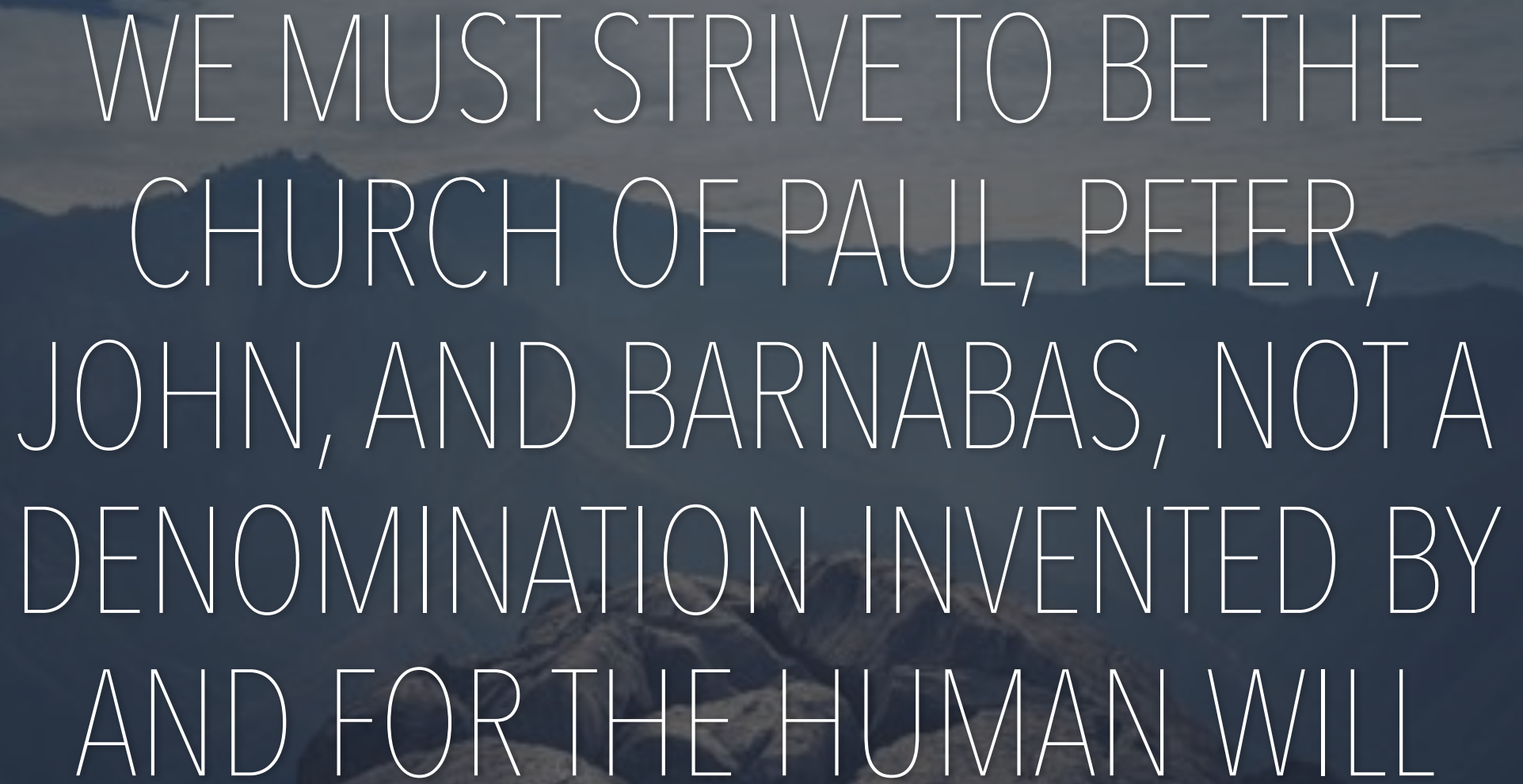
(and that includes groups that call themselves by a Biblical name but are still just as denominational as anybody else)

SYMPTOMS OF DENOMINATIONAL THINKING

- When we are more concerned about the broader fellowship – what others think or say about “us”, who is sound or not, how many churches there are in a certain area, what “our” worldwide membership is, knowing all the juicy “brotherhood” gossip, etc. Remember, Paul didn’t worry about what others thought (Gal. 2:6) or what others were doing. He focused on his work, making every immediate goal the priority.
- When traditions are more important than what God actually said (Matt. 15:1ff). Our refusal to worship with musical instruments, for example, is often viewed as a “tradition” of the Church of Christ and we are strange for insisting on it. Yet, instrumental music is the intrusion, the foreign object, the tradition that goes against God’s revealed will (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16, Heb. 13:15, 1 Cor. 14:15, Matt. 26:30), and people will fight to the bitter end to defend it.

SYMPTOMS OF DENOMINATIONAL THINKING

- When names and designations become more important than identity (2 Tim. 2:14-19, Rev. 3:1-3). We must be stubborn about this: the only name we wear is Christ's (Ac. 4:12, 11:26), so "church of Christ" is not a name, but a description.
- When we think we need to show off – perhaps because of an inferiority complex. Like Hezekiah (Is. 39) or the Judaizers in Galatia (Gal. 6:12ff), we might feel the need to seek validity in the religious marketplace by looking and acting just like the denominations.
- When we realize how out-of-place any of the apostles would feel if they came to our assembly today. Remember 1 Corinthians 4:6-16, and how far removed Paul felt from the state of the Corinthian Christians. They emphasized the wrong things and alienated the very figures who laid the foundation of their faith.



WE MUST STRIVE TO BE THE
CHURCH OF PAUL, PETER,
JOHN, AND BARNABAS, NOT A
DENOMINATION INVENTED BY
AND FOR THE HUMAN WILL