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# THE TRUTH ABOUT THAT TRADITION

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## The Origin of Christian Denominations



I recall an incident in my freshman year of college, at the University of Miami... I was among a group of students gathered together, just hanging out in someone's dormitory, when somehow, the topic of religion came up. Then someone went around the room asking each person their religious denomination. I believe there were Baptists, Catholics, and perhaps a Methodist; but when they got to me, I hesitated, then simply replied, "I'm Christian". And they all laughed. I think they thought I was being sarcastic, not really wanting to reveal; but the truth was, I really didn't uphold any particular denomination at the time. I attended my mother's Pentecostal church all of my life, because that was mandatory in our home. However I never joined the church. I really didn't understand their doctrine, nor the reason for so many different denominations. Besides, I noticed that there were no denominations mentioned in the Bible... *the disciples of Jesus Christ were just called Christians!*

*"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Acts 11:26b*

In the early 1980s, shortly after I became a Christian, I was surprised to learn that there were over 33,000 Christian denominations and sects worldwide! “According to a report published by the Center for Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, in mid-2014 there were over 45,000 Christian denominations worldwide. Furthermore that number is (supposedly) increasing at the rate of 2.2 new denominations per day.”

I am not certain about how many more groups have surfaced since 2014, but I was astounded to learn from one recently published source, that there may be as many as 50,000 denominations worldwide to date! How could so many different religious groups, said to worship the same God, develop from one church started by Jesus Christ approximately 2000 years ago?!

The dictionary definition of the word *denomination* is, *a recognized, independent, self-governing segment of a church*; in this case, referring to those Protestants who rejected teachings of the Catholic Church. In Acts 11:26b, we learn the origin of the term Christian... **“And the disciples (of Jesus) were called Christians first at Antioch.”**

In the beginning, there were several things that all Christians had in common which distinguished them as Christians: they believed that the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) were one (1 John. 5:7), that all men were sinners and needed a Savior (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:9), and they believed in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as their Savior (John 3:16). Furthermore, *the early Christians baptized only in the name of Jesus* (not His titles), and they all spoke in tongues when they received spiritual baptism (see page 3, Pentecostals).



However, even after rejecting Roman Catholicism, men did not return to the ordained teachings of the Apostles; instead, they began to establish their own doctrines, resulting in further division and more denominations. How ironic that we would end up with such a vast multitude of denominations, considering Jesus' prayer before His crucifixion, that His disciples would be ONE... **“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 (John 17:20-23).”***



From my research, I believe the consensus would be that we now have thousands of Christian denominations and sects because Christians have not adhered to biblical truths. The word *denomination* itself denotes, *division*. Again, men worldwide, who called themselves Christians (followers of Jesus Christ) have chosen to establish their own religious traditions, rather than continuing in the paths established by the Apostles. In Jesus' days on earth, the Scribes and Pharisees were religious 'hypocrites' who also rejected truth. Jesus rebuked them saying, *"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:8-9)."*

Today, the 45,000+ Christian denominations can be placed into five mainline religious groups, based upon doctrinal differences: Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Church, Protestants, and Post-Protestants. However, from the five, we have thousands of sub-groups which have evolved due to division and splits based upon carnality and doctrinal conflicts. Consequently, because we have Christians who do not agree on many things, what often results is unresolved issues among members who sometimes choose to leave the church to form their own group; hence, another denomination or sect.

Pentecostals were the first legitimate church group established by the Apostles of Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost (31 AD); at that time, the first Christians were all Jews. Later, the Samaritans (half-Jews) joined the church (Acts 8:26-40; 40 AD), and were followed by the Gentiles (non-Jews, Acts 10-11) in 41 AD. These groups all heard, believed, and adhered to the Apostles' doctrine for Salvation, which required *repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and Spirit baptism, with the evidence of speaking in tongues* (Acts 2:1-4, 38-39; 8:5-17; 10:1-48; 19:1-6).

**Present-day Pentecostals:** Apostolics, Church of God, Holiness, Church of God of Prophecy, Assemblies of God, United Pentecostals, Church of Our Lord, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, and Bible Way (to name only a few).

**Roman Catholics:** the largest of all "Christian" churches (established, 325 AD), with approximately 1.3 billion members worldwide (2018).

**Eastern Orthodox Church:** established 340 AD; the Roman Church of the East, forming The Byzantine Empire.

**Protestants Denominations:** Baptist, Anabaptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist (and many others). The movement began because Martin Luther protested against the teachings of the Catholic Church.

**Post-Protestants** (began around 1830-1950s): Seventh-Day Adventist, Church of the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Scientology. These groups are generally referred to as *cults*, due to their extreme beliefs that are outside of conventional European Christianity.