

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **SOUL-SAVING LESSONS** **“Out of Denominationalism”**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“‘Come out from among them and be separate,’ says the Lord” (2 Cor. 6:17). Welcome to our series of studies titled “Soul-Saving Lessons.” In today’s lesson we will be dealing with the subject of coming out of denominationalism. Is it God’s will that we be divided, and that that we name ourselves after groups started by men or by various teachings in the Bible? Does God want us to be divided, or is division against the will of God? As we study the Scriptures, it becomes clear that we are called out of division and out of denominationalism, and that we must stay true to the unity for which Christ Himself prayed. In this series of lessons, each one has been designed to see the truth of God’s will, and to preach the truth in love. Today’s lesson is no different. We are not offering this series of lessons to make fun of, belittle, or anger anyone. Rather, we want to “provoke one another to love and good works” (Heb. 10:24). How do we do that? We do it by preaching the truth of God’s Word (2 Tim. 4:2). This particular lesson on “Coming Out of Denominationalism” is intended to provoke us to study the Scriptures and to want to do God’s will. We are not claiming that there are no sincere religious people out there. There are sincere religious people in denominationalism. But a person can be sincere, yet be sincerely wrong. We learn from Romans 10:2 that some had a “zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” We need to make sure that we have “obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine that God has delivered. This lesson is designed to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). The Scripture says that we must “buy the truth and sell it not” (Prov. 23:23). Truth is the most valuable commodity we can possess. If we get it, we need to make sure to hold onto it. We must allow the truth to run a free course in our lives, and we must never attempt to change it just to be popular. We are here to speak the truth. But we also are here to speak the truth in love. Proverbs 27:5 says that “open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.” If we said, “We love your eternal soul,” but we knew that you were doing things that were not according to the will of God, and we never said anything about it, would that be real love? No, it would not. Real love demands that we say what God has said from a motivation of wanting people to ultimately go to Heaven.

Why should people come out of denominationalism? Here are some reasons why denominationalism cannot be God’s will. Denominationalism divides the body of Christ and is contrary to Scripture. If a person is in a denomination, that group represents a division of the body of Christ, and thus cannot be right. Jesus prayed in John 17:20-21, “I pray that “they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” Jesus prayed for oneness and unity because such unity proves to the world that Jesus is the Son of God. If unity proves Jesus is God’s Son, then what does denominationalism prove? It shows that those who claim to be “Christians” cannot even agree on what God and Christ taught. That is not the will of God. Ephesians 4:3 says that we are to endeavor to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” We are to have spiritual unity based on the bond of

peace, which is the Word of God. I want you to see God's ultimate view of unity. In Psalm 133:1 we are told, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" God says that unity is good and pleasant, and that it is His will for His people to dwell together and be unified. Denominationalism cannot promote unity. From 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 we learn that denominationalism is against the will of God. "Let there be no divisions among you." If denominationalism causes division, and if division is wrong, then naturally, denominationalism is wrong.

People must come out of denominationalism because it is not authorized in the Word of God. Must we do all things according to the pattern? Hebrews 8:5 teaches us by principle that, yes, we must. Must we ask, "Is there any word from the Lord" (Jer. 37:17)? Do we need to be concerned with "What does the Scripture say?" (Rom. 4:3)? Absolutely! We need to have the mindset of John 2:5 where whatever Jesus says to us, we are willing to do it. We must realize that Jesus and God have not authorized denominationalism in the Bible. In Matthew 28:18 we are told that Jesus has "all authority in heaven and on earth." If that is the case (and it is), where did Jesus say, "You go be a part of this group, and you go be a part of that group, and you be a part of that one, and you'll all be OK"? That is not what Jesus said. He never authorized division in His name. Some people today say, "It doesn't matter how we get to Heaven. We are all just on different roads going to the same place." That's true—because everyone involved in denominationalism is on a different road going to the same place: eternal destruction! Division is not the will of God. Colossians 3:17 tells us, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Until we can find in the Scriptures a place that says, "Divide in My name," there is no authority for denominationalism. Furthermore, in the Scriptures denominationalism is explicitly forbidden for God's people. Where do we find such a statement? Look at 1 Corinthians 1:10-13.

"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

Can you not see here the clear command for Christians not to divide? This is where denominationalism is explicitly forbidden. We are to have the same mind, and be of the same judgment. There is to be "no division" among us. We are to be "perfectly joined together." Is that what denominationalism does? No—it does the exact opposite. Let me show you from this passage that what we see today is just as wrong as what was happening in the first century. Were you to ask most people to whom the first letter to the Corinthians was written, "Are you a member of the one universal church?" They would say, "Sure we are. We're just a sect that follows Apollos. He's a really eloquent man." Or, some might say, "We like Paul, who suffered for the Lord." Others might say, "We follow Peter because we can relate to him." Someone else might say, "We are followers of Christ." There is a "big, universal idea." Then there are sects that come from that. Is that right? Paul said, "Let there be no divisions among you." Now let's bring this to our time today. Were you to ask most people about this issue (and press them on it), they would say, "Ultimately, we're all a part of that one, big, universal body. We're just the sect that follows such-and-such teaching on repentance." Or some might say, "We are followers of Martin Luther." Others might say, "We are followers of John Wesley." What did Paul say? "Let there be no divisions among you!" Just as division was wrong in the first century (and explicitly forbidden), denominationalism is an exact parallel today. It is

against the will of God. We must not be divided into denominations, yet expect God to be happy.

Another reason why denominationalism is wrong (and why people must come out of it) has to do with the fact that it follows the teaching of men rather than of God. Can we follow the teaching of men, yet be right with God. We are told in 2 John 9, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." If we put men's doctrines first, we should not call God "Father" because we have severed ourselves from Him. Revelation 22:18-19 speaks out against "adding to" or "taking away from" God's Word. If we follow doctrines of men, we have to do at least one of those. If we do that, then the plagues written in the Book of Life will come upon us. We are not to "go beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6). We cannot stay within the boundaries that God has set, yet simultaneously follow the teachings of men. The Scripture says that we are not to add to or take from God's Word, "lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar" (Prov. 30:6). I want you to see a passage from the Scriptures which shows that people were trying to follow the teachings of men and God at the same time, and which caused Jesus to tell them that could not have it both ways. In Matthew 15:7-9 we read,

"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

Denominationalism is against the will of God because it teaches as doctrine the commandments of men. Jesus did not authorize denominationalism, and it cannot be found within the Scriptures. So where does it come from? It comes from men's opinions and from the prejudices and biases the men have, and that are interjected into religion. And we think that God will be OK with that? Denominationalism is a sin because it follows men's teachings rather than God's. We are just as much a hypocrite today if we say, "I'm a part of the body of Christ, but we follow so-and-so." We are either following Christ or we are not. We are either a member of the Lord's body (the one church that Jesus established), or we are in denominationalism, which is against God's will.

Another reason that denominationalism is something out of which a person must come is because it creates unnecessary confusion and doubt among those in the world. Is God the Author of such confusion and doubt? Let's see what the Scripture has to say about that. In 1 Corinthians 14:33 we read, "God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." Is God the Author of confusion? Absolutely not! If denominationalism creates confusion and doubt among those in the world (Jn. 17:20-21), then that disproves that Jesus is the Son of God. God is not the Author of confusion. Thus, we must not be involved in denominationalism. God's plan of salvation is clear and simple. John 8:32 tells us that we can know the truth, and that the truth will make us free. When we read God's Word, we can understand it (Eph. 3:4). We need not be ignorant because we can understand the will of God (Eph. 5:17). We must realize that denominationalism creates confusion and doubt. We must not be a part of that.

Let's look at some specific biblical passages that call people out of denominationalism. Ephesians 4:4 says that there is "one body." The oneness of the church of Christ ought to call people out of denominationalism. What do I mean by "one body"? In Ephesians 1:22-23 we learn that the body is the church. If the body is the church, and if there is only one body, then how many churches did Christ establish? Just one! Jesus promised to build, and did build, only one church. Jesus did not say to Peter in Matthew 16:18, "Upon these rocks I will build My churches." He said, "Upon this rock [the fact that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God] I will build My church." "Rock" is singular, and

“church” likewise is singular. There is only one body. In 1 Corinthians 15:24 we learn that Jesus will return one day to receive only one kingdom (the church), which He will deliver up to His Father. When the Bible teaches that there is only one church, that calls people out of denominationalism.

The scriptural Head of the church calls people out of denominationalism. Anytime there is a group that says, “We look to such-and-such a city and our head for a decision,” people need to run away from that as quickly as they can. The Bible says in Ephesians 1:22-23 that Jesus is the Head of the church, which is the body. He is still reigning from Heaven (Heb. 1:4). God’s Word has already been settled in Heaven (Ps. 119:89). And we do not need a supposed head of our religion on Earth, whether it be in Rome, Salt Lake City, Utah, or Springfield, Missouri. We do not need a head on Earth making decisions today. The church has not been decapitated because Jesus is still its Head.

The scriptural Founder and Owner of the church calls people out of denominationalism. Who owns the church? In Acts 20:28 the Bible says that Jesus “purchased the church with His own blood.” Who paid the price? Jesus did. Who is the Owner of the church? Jesus is. Who is the church’s Founder? In 1 Corinthians 3:11 we are told, “No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” If Christ is the Founder and the Owner, then any group that has a founder among men of the past or men of the past is not the church of which we read in the New Testament. Any church whose founder is not Jesus should encourage us to get out of denominationalism.

Another thing that calls us out of denominationalism is the biblical plan of salvation that we find in the Scriptures. It is found in a nutshell in Acts 18:8—“Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.” God’s plan of salvation is very simple. Men and women hear God’s Word. They believe in Jesus. They repent of their sins. They make the same good confession that the Ethiopian eunuch made in Acts 8. And they are baptized in water for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 22:16). Any group that teaches a plan of salvation different than that is not the Lord’s church. It is a group started by men, and that is based upon the doctrines of men. It will never get anyone to Heaven.

When we look to the Scriptures, we find passages that call us out of denominationalism. If a person has come out of denominationalism, he or she must never go back into it. How sad it is when members of the body of Christ (who held in their hands “the pearl of great price”) return to the way of error. How horrible and filthy an image that is in Scripture. The Bible describes it as returning to the way of error, or returning to the filth, much, and mire of sin. What is it like when a member of the church leaves the church and goes back into worldliness, sin, or religious error? In 2 Peter 2:20-22 we are told,

“If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’”

Look at the disgusting picture of the person who leaves truth and turns back to error—whether it be to the world of sin or to the world of denominationalism. How does God view that? “If you escape the pollution of the world, but then return to it, it will be worse for you,” God says. It will be worse because that person knows what he or she once had, yet freely gave it up. Think about how disgusting the two images presented by Peter are. It’s like a dog returns to its own vomit. How disgusting a picture that is! That is how God feels when a Christian leaves the truth and returns to error. It is like a sow that was

washed then returns to wallowing in the mire. It once was nice and clean, but then jumped right back into the mud hole. That is how God views one of His children leaving the church and going into denominationalism and religious error. A person who has come out of denominationalism must never return to it because being eternally lost will be worse for that individual.

We are not saying that the fires of Hell will not burn both the worldly person and the person who is in denominationalism. Luke 16 teaches that it will. But Luke 16 also teaches that we will be able to possess memories in Hell. Abraham said to the rich man, "Son, remember..." (Lk. 16:25). If, as a child of God (a member of the one church) a person leaves the truth and goes into error, it will be worse for him because he will know what he had and what he gave up. He also will know that it was not worth it. What a horrible thought that would be to possess for all eternity. That person had the pearl of great price, and was on the road to Heaven, but gave it up for pleasures, lusts, and in order to make other people happy.

Another reason that a person must never return to denominationalism has to do with the fact that it is impossible to possess the spiritual blessings discussed in the Bible while being in religious error. Ephesians 1:3 teaches us that all spiritual blessings are ours "in Christ." We have every blessing imaginable "in Christ" (Acts 4:13). We have the power to be transformed from a life of worthlessness to a life where people can see us as examples of how to live correctly. We have the hope of a future resurrection, knowing that even though our bodies will go into the grave, we one day will be in God's presence at "the resurrection and the life." We have the knowledge and joy that our sins have been washed away, and that the Lord has added us to His church. If we give up those things, we lose out on so much! We know that God hears the prayer of the righteous, and that He does not hear the prayer of sinners (Ps. 66:18). If we return to denominationalism and religious error, we cannot expect God to hear our prayers and to be pleased with us. By doing that, we lose the privilege to look up into Heaven and say, "Our Father Who art in Heaven...." That privilege will not longer be ours if we return to religious error.

I want to make it as clear and plain as possible that the Bible says that if a person returns to denominationalism after having been a member of the Lord's church, he will not make it to Heaven. In 2 Timothy 1:9-10 we are taught that salvation is "in Christ." That is God's plan. If the body of Christ is the church of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), and if a person leaves the body of Christ, then that person will not be saved. Revelation 22:14 says, "Blessed are those who keep His commandments." If one of His commandments is "Be faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:10), and a person does not keep that commandment, then that person will not be saved. Revelation 14:4 teaches us that those who will be with the redeemed of the ages will be those who followed the Lamb "wheresoever He went." We cannot follow the Lamb [Jesus Christ] in denominationalism because Jesus never authorized denominationalism. In Psalm 119:89 we are told that God's Word has been "settled in heaven." If the matter has already been decided by God, and we go against what Scripture teaches, then we cannot be right with God or expect to live in Heaven after having lived here on Earth in direct opposition to His Word and will. A person is not your enemy when he speaks the truth to you. Galatians 4:16 tells us that we do not become a person's enemy by speaking the truth. We must say what God has said. It is the truth that will set us free. As a member of the body of Christ, a person can know that he or she will receive eternal life (1 Jn. 5:13). A person can know that he or she is "in Christ," and that that is the one way to Heaven (Mt. 7:13-14). A person also can be sure that if he gives up on the church, there is no hope for him. We must never return to denominationalism.

Are you a part of that which divides Christianity? Or are you a part of the one body of Christ? Are you a part of a group that follows the teachings of men such as John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Knox, or John Wesley? Are you a group of people who came not long after the apostles, yet were not inspired? Are you following the teachings of men? Can the group of which you are a part be found in the New Testament? Or, did it come thousands of years later? If it is not in the Bible, you can be sure that it is not approved by God. It is “denominationalism.”

Someone might be thinking, “That sounds harsh because you’re saying that people in denominationalism will be lost.” We are not trying to put the emphasis on how others will be lost. We are trying to emphasize what people need to do to be saved (right with God). If you were sick, and you went to the doctor, wouldn’t you want the doctor to come right out and tell you, “Here’s the problem, here are your chances, and here are the things you can do to possibly live a little longer and have a happy, healthy, and productive life”? Sure you would! If he didn’t tell you that, you would be upset. Jesus is the Great Physician. He has all the answers to all the spiritual questions, and has given them to us in His Word. Much of what people are doing today is not found in the Bible. We must listen to what Jesus says when He speaks to us about religious error and how it will cause people to lose their souls. A person cannot be saved outside the church. A person cannot be saved with a manmade plan of salvation. A person cannot be saved by worshipping God in ways that are not right. The only way to be saved is to submit to God’s will, follow the purity of New Testament Christianity, and leave division and chaos behind. I want to plead with you today to give up denominationalism and be just a Christian—nothing more, nothing less. Be just a Christian, and do what the Bible says. Then you can know that you are right with God. If you are not a Christian, become a member of the Lord’s body today. If you are in denominationalism, for the sake of your soul, “Come out from among them, and be separate.”

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “OUT OF DENOMINATIONALISM”

1. Why did Paul say to the people of Corinth, “‘Come out from among them and be ye separate,’ says the Lord” (2 Cor. 6:17)?
2. Rather than bringing unity, denominationalism brings something else into the body of Christ. What is that “something else”?
3. For what did Jesus pray in John 17:20-21?
4. For what did Paul plead in 1 Corinthians 1:10?
5. What is the message of Psalm 133:1?
6. According to 1 Corinthians 4:6, what are we **not** to do?
7. What, according to Proverbs 30:6, is something else that we are not to do?
8. What is the impact of 1 Corinthians 1:10 on modern-day denominationalism?
9. According to 2 John 9, what happens to those who “go beyond” the doctrine of Christ?
10. In the latter part of John 17:21, Jesus gave a specific reason as to why Christians should be united. What was that reason?
11. According to Ephesians 1:21-23, who is the head of the church?
12. According to Acts 20:28, who owns the church?
13. What principle is contained in 1 Corinthians 3:11?
14. According to 2 Peter 2:20-22, what would be the state of a person who once knew the truth, but then went into denominationalism?
15. According to 2 Timothy 1:9, where is salvation found?
16. In Revelation 22:14, God promised to bless a certain group of people. Who are those people?
17. Why does denominationalism create confusion and doubt in the minds of people?
18. What effect does the confusion and doubt created by denominationalism ultimately have on the Sonship of Christ in the minds of those in the world?
19. What does Ephesians 5:17 tell us **not** to do, and **to** do?
20. According to Matthew 16:18, how many churches did Christ promise to establish?
21. What, according to 1 John 5:13, can a faithful Christian know with certainty?