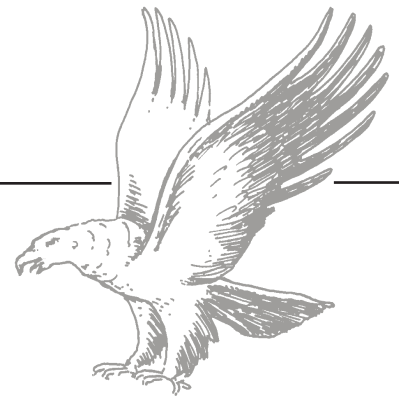


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



August 21, 2016

The Curse of Denominationalism

The splintering of Christianity into thousands of sects has done irreparable harm to the religion of Christ. If we wish to honor Him, we cannot be indifferent to this scandal of division.

“[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” (Jn. 17:21).

“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. . . . Each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor. 1:10-13).



The explosion of Christian denominations over the last several centuries — exacerbated by the rise of democracy and political freedom here in America—has turned Christianity into a maze of competing factions. Most people have come to accept it as normal.

But a fragmented Christianity is not what the Lord intended. In the beginning He promised to build “My church” (singular), and in His final prayer just hours before He died, He prayed that His fol-

lowers would be united in Him, “that the world may believe.” In other words, the credibility of His teaching would be directly tied to the degree of unity His followers could maintain.

The early New Testament church was a fairly unified entity. One exception was the local group in Corinth. In dealing with the bickering and infighting that was tearing up this church and destroying their influence in their community, Paul urged that “there be no divisions among you.” His plea repudiates the denominational spirit that lies at the heart of modern Christianity.

Denominationalism is a curse on Christianity for a number of reasons: First, *it hardens the differences among believers*, making reconciliation more difficult. Once differences have been locked into sectarian names, organizations, and statements of faith, it is almost impossible to ever move beyond them. Spiritual growth stagnates inside high walls created by sectarian loyalties.

Denominationalism *feeds human pride*. Partisans are more concerned about preserving the internal machinery

of their own group (and their personal positions within those groups) than serving humanity. Indeed, many of today’s sectarian bodies grew out of shameful power struggles in earlier generations.

Finally, denominationalism *promotes human traditions over Scripture*. The stark differences in worship, organization, and doctrine among all these groups cannot possibly all originate from the same source. *Somebody* is intermingling human traditions with Scripture to create such a cacophony of confusion. And the Lord is not happy.

In recent years I’ve noticed that more and more churches are turning away from sectarian affiliations in favor of a more generic, localized, non-denominational identity. This suggests that people are finally waking up to the fact that denominationalism is harmful to the cause of Christ.

This is a good thing. We should take advantage of this trend to emphasize our own non-denominational identity. More importantly, we should take care to avoid developing a denominational mindset ourselves.

– David King