

Why I Am Not... Non-Denominational

I. History

- A. Non-Denominational churches are difficult to trace because of their independence and variety of positions.
- B. In a sense, independent congregations have existed since the foundation of the church (that was God's plan for them, by the way)
- C. In America in the past century or so, there has been a rising movement against denominations, their governance and politics especially, that has led to congregation claiming to be independent.
- D. According to various sources, the movement has grown from 200,000 members in 1990, to 8,000,000 in 2008, to 12,000,000 in 2012.
- E. Thom Rainer conducted an informal poll that revealed these main eight reasons why people attend non-denominational churches:
 - 1. Denominational churches have a negative reputation. Some respondents used the phrase "negative brand" to communicate this reason.
 - 2. Denominations are known more for what they are against than what they are for.
 - 3. There is too much infighting and politics in denominations.
 - 4. The denominational churches are too liberal. From what I can tell from these respondents, they are current and former members of mainline churches.
 - 5. There is a general waning of institutional loyalty in institutions such as denominations.
 - 6. Denominations have inefficient systems and organizations. They are too bureaucratic.
 - 7. Some of the respondents could see no perceived benefit to belonging to denominations.
 - 8. Denominations are not good stewards of their financial resources.
- A. Bonus! Bible Churches
 - Began as a movement in the 1940's as a conservative, practically fundamentalist, response to problems in mainline denominations
 - Usually they are very conservative, very similar to Baptists. They often are of the Reformed tradition.
 - Dallas Theological Seminary has been very prominent in this movement.

II. Some Issues

- A. Denominations define, not just divide.
 - Many non-denominational churches tend to be very weak on doctrine and heavy on worship and fellowship.
 - Because non-denominational churches run the full spectrum of doctrine, you may not know if they are Charismatic, Progressive, Evangelical, or extremely conservative.

- NOTE - Baptists are often classified as a denomination, but the heavy emphasis on local church autonomy almost always leave these congregations independent. There is no official hierarchy or voice for the Baptists. There are many voluntary associations or conventions but not one ruling over another.
- B. Non-denominational churches often downplay doctrine for the sake of unity or growth.
 - Doctrine defines us.
 - False doctrine and false teachers do exist - I Timothy 6:3-5, II Peter 2:1-3
 - Be leery of any group or church that will not tell you what they believe
- C. Non-denominational is sometimes a code word for ecumenicalism
 - This is especially true with ministries other than churches.
 - Ecumenicalism is the idea that all churches of all creeds should set aside differences for the sake of unity.
 - I'm sorry, but we've seen too many critical doctrinal errors in the groups we have study to have close relations with many of them.
- D. While often standing for foundational doctrines, they often more liberally minded on other issues
 - A quick look online at the "what we believe" pages of many non-denominational church websites will show very, very basic tenets.
 - Another example, many are "dual practice" when it comes to baptism.