

# **Dawson-Graham Debate**

*What Constitutes  
a Denomination?*

**February 5-19, 2005**



## **Graham's Personal Introduction**

Thank you for letting me present the Affirmative of the upcoming debate. I have read much material concerning as to whether the churches of the Restoration movement should be classified as a denomination or not. I have never been satisfied that this position could be defended if the propositions were worded to the understanding of how church Denominationalism is understood outside the Restoration movement.

I will do my best be as concise as possible and be timely with my responses.

Sincerely,

Lynn Graham

## **Dawson's Personal Introduction**

A physics and mathematics graduate from Texas Tech University, Samuel G. Dawson did research in celestial mechanics and intercontinental ballistic missile guidance in the aerospace industry before preparing to preach the gospel of Christ. In twenty-two years of public teaching, he did extensive live call-in radio work daily for eight years and participated in a number of religious debates. Sam's scientific background has given him an inquisitive, logical, and thorough approach to the scriptures and a reputation for making Bible students re-think teaching they've taken for granted.

Sam drew on decades of experience working with local congregations to write *Fellowship: With God and His People: The Way of Christ Without Denominationalism; Denominational Doctrines: Explained, Examined, Exposed;* and *Christians, Churches, & Controversy: Navigating Doctrinal & Personal Clashes.*

In *Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage: The Uniform Teaching of Moses, Jesus, & Paul*, Sam demonstrates how Moses, Jesus, and Paul all taught the same thing about this controversial subject. It deals frankly with issues confronting many Christians today and the people they are trying to teach.

*The Teaching of Jesus: A Faithful Rabbi Urgently Warns Rebellious Israel* shows how many people take Jesus' teaching out of the context of the people he preached to and misapply it to our day. His next volume will be *How to Study the Bible: A Practical Guide to Independent Bible Study.*

Sam worked mostly in the western part of the United States and presently lives in Texas with his wife Patsy, author of the *Marriage: A Taste of Heaven* series.

## **Graham's First Affirmative**

ALL CONGREGATIONS THAT FOLLOW THE SAME DOCTRINE AND CHOOSE TO STRICTLY ADHERE TO THE SAME AND ONLY SPECIFIC OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT NAME SUCH AS (C/church of God Acts 20:28) MAKES THOSE CONGREGATIONS A DENOMINATION.

AFFIRM: LYNN GRAHAM

DENY: SAMUEL G. DAWSON

DENOMINATION- (3) NAME, DESIGNATION, a general name for a category. (4) a religious organization uniting local congregations in a single, legal and administrative body.

DENOMINATIONALISM- (1) devotion to denominational principles or interests. (2) the emphasizing of denominational differences to the point of being narrowly exclusive SECTARIANISM. (MERRIAM WEBSTER'S COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY 10th ed).

Today, with all the different practices of congregations that profess to follow Christ, it is impossible NOT to Denominate in order to find the congregation whose practice we are familiar with. If we have not planned beforehand, and we are traveling in an unfamiliar location, we either drive around looking at the names on the church buildings, or stop and ask someone where the congregation meets that goes by the name ' ' or search the phone book under church names, to find the name of the congregation whose practice we are familiar with.

A congregation will make replicas of itself all over the world. It will have these replicas model themselves in organization, worship, work, and wear the same name. Yet many like these will claim to be Non-Denominational. A church does not have to have an earthly Head Quarters in order to be classified as a Denomination. According to the dictionary, a religious body need only 'emphasize the differences to the point of being narrowly exclusive...'

#### ALL CONGREGATIONS THAT FOLLOW THE SAME DOCTRINE.....

How do congregations all follow the same doctrine today, on such subjects as Marriage-Divorce-Remarriage, how the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian, the cups-Pastor or 'located Preacher' {Pro. Orator] issue, the Sunday School 'classes' and Vacation Bible School issue, and church promotion of Human Institutions issue? They cannot.....without a human centralized source of authority somewhere, instructing them on these issues.

1Corinthians 1:10-15 "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name."

It is elementary that 1Cor.1:12-15 teaches that it is unscriptural to name churches and church practices after men. However, without a human central source of authority, it would not be possible to make congregations universal replicas of each other on all church doctrine subjects in order....."that we all speak the

same thing, and that there be no divisions among us; but that we be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement."

The only church that was ever Non-Denominational was the church of the 1st century. The church was extremely unique. It's human authority was the Apostles and it was guided by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Samuel G. Dawson:

1. If a church advertises it's name as 'church of the Firstborn' yet to your satisfaction practices everything else according to scripture, is it still a Denomination? Yes or No

2. Would you recommend full fellowship with that church? Yes or No

3. Can a church denominate yet not be classified as a Denomination? Yes or No





## **Dawson's First Negative**

All congregations that follow the same doctrine and choose to strictly adhere to the same and only specific Old or New Testament name such as (Church/church of God Acts 20:28) makes those congregations a Denomination

Affirm: Lynn Graham  
Deny: Samuel G. Dawson

### **Introduction**

With all due respect, Lynn, I can't tell for sure whether you are opposed to denominationalism, not that it matters as to the meaning of the word denomination. If you are, I commend you for it.

I appreciate very much Lynn's willingness to discuss the proposition he challenged with, the availability of this forum, and the willingness of each reader to delve into this important subject.

In several ways, this is an unusual debate because we're not debating a biblical concept. Jesus didn't build a denomination, nor did the Apostles work in one. The word denomination doesn't occur in the Bible, nor is it defined in the Bible. Thus, Lynn and I disagree on the meaning of a word which isn't Biblical, and we'll not be using Bible verses glean the definition. This is not the norm in such a forum as religiousdebates.com.

What constitutes a denomination is an extremely important and timely subject. I say it's timely because there is less denominational allegiance in the religious world now than at any time in the lifetime of most of us. Many churches now avoid denominational names, even if they're a part of a denominational organization. They realize that many people in our country have no denominational allegiance. For those of us who are trying to acquaint others with the way of Christ without denominationalism, this presents a tremendous teaching opportunity. .

However, in general, we're not taking much advantage of this situation. One reason is that most of us are not all that clear on what constitutes a denomination. With all due respect, this includes Lynn, although he may be opposed to denominationalism with all his heart. He isn't clear on the concept, yet. If I thought he knew what a denomination is, I wouldn't have committed to negating his proposition.

You can be a good fellow to oppose denominationalism without knowing what one is. The reason I know that is because I opposed denominationalism from the time I obeyed the gospel at the age of 15 without having a clear concept of denominationalism. I exposed denominational creeds, opposed denominational names, exposed denominational doctrines, and eventually debated denominational preachers for thirty years before I learned what a denomination is. I suspect others are doing the same, including Lynn. I have no doubt that Lynn is a good fellow, too. As a matter of fact, I'll be surprised if he and I aren't good friends after this debate is concluded.

When I finally learned what constitutes a denomination, I found I was thinking in denominational terms way too much. I had to drastically change my thinking with respect to our Lord's church. I suspect others are and will do the same.

So, I expect this debate to do a lot of good in clarifying what it is we're actually opposed to. I also hope to explore the differences between thinking denominationally, and acting denominationally. Many of us who do not act denominationally certainly

think in denominational terms. If we can learn to think denominationally, it will help prevent us from acting in such a fashion.

Now, to address Lynn's first affirmative.

Lynn begins with a definition from Webster's dictionary relating to the idea of naming or denominating, along with an organizational component. I think most of us would hope for a more serious development of the concept of a denomination, and I will do that in my affirmative. I think we'll see before this study is concluded that naming or denominating something has very little indeed to do with a religious denomination, Webster notwithstanding. For the present, I would merely point out that most of us have very little confidence in a popular dictionary when we're seeking information on religious terms. We wouldn't touch Webster for a reliable definition of baptism with a 10-foot pole if it were dry oak. Likewise with definitions of easter, passover, kingdom, etc..

Lynn then states that it is impossible not to denominate to find the congregation whose practice we are familiar with. As we'll see, the Bible specifies no exclusive name for a congregation. Even if it did, the name doesn't tell us where they are doctrinally on the subjects of Lynn's concern: MDR, the container question, indwelling of the Holy Spirit, located preacher, institutionalism, etc. The name doesn't serve that purpose at all!

Lynn speaks of the problem we have when traveling if we can't find the name on the building or in the yellow pages. Is worshipping with a congregation you know so little about even a duty that is enjoined on us by Christ? It's been my practice, but are we obligated to worship with a congregation we're not in fellowship with? If we are, where is the passage?

Lynn then says that a congregation will make replicas of itself all over the world, so that they will have the same name. I've never heard of such! Why would a congregation do that? Where do you find that in the New Testament? Which congregation in the Bible ever made replicas of itself all over the world?

When Lynn says that a denomination doesn't have to have an earthly headquarters, I enthusiastically agree. I would even say that a denomination doesn't even have a heavenly headquarters, and I'll bet Lynn will agree with that, as well.

Lynn uses Webster's to say that denominations must emphasize doctrinal differences to the point of being narrowly exclusive. To the contrary, we'll see that congregations can constitute a denomination without having the same name and being narrowly exclusive.

On the doctrinal side, Lynn asks, "How do congregations all follow the same doctrine today?" My response is, "Why should they even try?" Is that part of the work of a local church, to make sure it lines up with other congregations doctrinally? Where does the New Testament teach that? Eventually, we'll see that in the non-denominational way of Christ, we need have no work larger than a local church, and that one congregation may serve the Lord fully, faithfully, and scripturally without ever knowing that another congregation exists!

I appreciate the sentiment of Lynn's use of I Cor. 1.10-15, as we know that Jesus deplores religious division as a work of the flesh. However, this passage speaks not of denominational divisions, but divisions within a local congregation based on too much allegiance to men. Lynn says that the passage teaches that it is unscriptural to name churches and church practices. Read the verse for yourself. There's absolutely nothing about naming churches in it!

Lynn asserts that the only church that was ever non-denominational was the church of the first century. Do all the readers believe that statement to be true? If true, and Lynn is a member of a church, he's a member of a denomination. Statements like this make me wonder if Lynn is opposed to denominationalism. Please remember to answer that question for us, Lynn.

Answers to Lynn's questions for me:

1. If a church advertises it's name as 'church of the Firstborn' yet to your satisfaction practices everything else according to scripture, is it still a Denomination? Yes or No

Absolutely not, even though it is clearly named. Its name betrays a misunderstanding of the New Testament because in Hebrews, "firstborn" is plural, not referring to Christ, but to the "firstborn ones" who are in heaven. Also this church wouldn't be a denomination because it's absolutely impossible for a single congregation to be a denomination, as we'll see when we develop a proper definition in the affirmative. Lynn's proposition speaks of "churches" constituting a denomination, not one.

2. Would you recommend full fellowship with that church? Yes or No

More than likely, but it probably wouldn't be too long before I addressed their unscriptural name, which is what I'll be doing in this debate as well.

3. Can a church denominate yet not be classified as a Denomination? Yes or No

I'm not quite sure what Lynn means. WHAT is the church denominating? Itself? The town? Their children? Their dogs? If you mean that they name their local church, they surely can and still not be a denomination. Again, one church by itself cannot be a denomination. There's so much more than a name to a religious denomination, and we'll that the name has very little to do with the subject, many times nothing at all.

Lynn's affirming all congregations following same doctrine and strictly adhering TO THE SAME AND ONLY SPECIFIC OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT NAME (emphasis mine--SGD) makes those congregations a denomination. If this is true, then TWO congregations following the same doctrine and name would be a denomination. With this in mind, here are some questions for Lynn to bring out the nuances of his definition.

QUESTION: Would two such congregations, one of which existed two centuries before the other, constitute a denomination?

QUESTION: Would two congregations simultaneously following the New Testament, one in Africa and one in California, constitute a denomination, even if they never had contact, and didn't even speak the same language?

QUESTION: Would two such congregations having never heard of each other and had no functional connection constitute a denomination?

QUESTION: Would two such congregations never engaging in collective action constitute a denomination?

QUESTION: If two congregations both adhered to the New Testament, yet one had an unscriptural name, would you advise the one with the unscriptural name to adapt a scriptural name like the other congregations, thus becoming (according to your proposition) a denomination, or should they avoid becoming a denomination by retaining their unscriptural name?

QUESTION: Would the congregations following what Paul taught everywhere the same thing (1 Cor. 4:17) be considered a denomination if they were called by the same name?

While it's not (in my opinion) especially pertinent to the definition of a denomination, Lynn's proposition mentions **THE SAME AND ONLY SPECIFIC OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT NAME**. If he thinks that phrase is important enough to put in his proposition, I'm bound to take the point up. I don't agree at all that congregations in the Bible had "the same and only specific name."

### **There Is No Exclusive Proper Name for a Local Church**

Believers in Christ who strive to be just Christians have long been concerned about scriptural names, both for themselves as individual Christians and for the local church. Some have gone so far as to affirm an exclusive proper name for the body of Christ, some saying it must be “church of God” or “church of Christ.” The integrity of those brethren we have no reason to call in question, but our study of the nature of the church will have some effects on the way we deal with this question as well.

If we consider the two ways the word “church” is used in the New Testament, we could use “The Church of Christ” or “The Church of God” to talk about the universal church. It is not likely we would call a local church these names, since many churches of Christ (Rom. 16.16) and churches of God (I Cor. 1.2) exist. In speaking of a local church, we could say “a Church of Christ” or “a church of God,” and use the term as it was used in the New Testament.

Local churches that are insistent on one of these names use neither the definite article “the” or the indefinite article “a,” but merely “Church of Christ” or “Church of God.” Neither did Lynn in his debate proposition. This may reflect that they think of neither the universal church nor a local one, but possibly of some alignment of local churches. The absence of an article is interesting, to say the least. Occasionally, a sign in front of the building of a non-denominational group says, “Christians meet here.”

The singular of “churches of Christ”, which is scriptural and understandable, is NOT “church of Christ,” but "a church of Christ," which is not used in the New Testament, but is understandable.

"Church of Christ" by itself means nothing. To illustrate, once after preaching in a congregation, a number of mature Bible students were outside visiting. I pointed out that the sign on the

front of the building said, "Church of Christ meets here". I asked them which church of Christ that referred to, the universal church or a local church.

They looked at me like I had leprosy, and wondered what in the world I meant. I said, if it said "the church of Christ" I would take it to be the universal church, in which case the sign would be wrong, and if it said "a church of Christ," I would take it to be a local church. In point of fact, it said neither. So I asked again what it meant. One of them said, "It means we're still thinking denominationally." No one knows what it means, if they stop to think about it.

As the maiden told Peter in Mt. 26.73, "The way you talk gives you away" on this subject. Listen to the following words that use a name (church of Christ) in definitely an unscriptural, denominational sense:

"My childhood was of the strict and straight Church of Christ variety. As a teenager, I was the moral and doctrinal example of Church of Christ orthodoxy. I memorized all the scriptures that are important to the Church of Christ. I mesmerized myself with the Church of Christ doctrines and vigorously defended the Lord's church! I was proud of my religion. I was conscientious and zealous. I chose to go to a Church of Christ college because of my affection for the Church of Christ doctrines." (Wayne Willis, "The Plight of the Church of Christ Liberal," *Mission*, June 1973, pp. 9, 10.)

Reflection on this person's use of "church of Christ" reveals he doesn't use it of the universal church that scripturally has no college, no collectively set forth doctrines, etc. Nor does he speak of a local church. Rather, he uses the term in a denominational sense, in other words, the doctrines and colleges of a collective of congregations. Thus, we hear of "church of Christ preachers," "church of Christ songbooks," etc. All similar uses of the term neither speak of the universal church that belongs to Christ nor of a local church, but of an alignment of local churches acting



collectively, i.e., a denomination. This is not to say these folks consider themselves a denomination, nor that they are; but they certainly use the term denominationally.

One church put “The Acts 2:38 Church of Christ” on their building, while another wrote the following: “The Church of the New Jerusalem--The One John Saw Coming Right Down Out of Heaven.” (Talmadge F. McNabb, ‘The Church with the Right Name,’” *Sentinel of Truth*, IV, 4, October 1968, cited by Monroe Hawley, *Redigging the Wells* [Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1976], p. 135.)

All of which leads us to ask, “Is there an exclusive proper name for the Lord’s church?” Were the terms “church of Christ” and “church of God,” used in the New Testament in the sense of an exclusive proper name, or were they used to show ownership and relationship?

The fact that the Bible uses several different terms shows none of them is exclusive. The term “the churches of Christ” is used in the New Testament to speak of people who belong to Christ, who are in Christ in specific locales. So with the term “church of God,” whether used universally or locally, the term comprises people who belong to God, not the text of the sign on their building, nor a proper name.

Note these examples: “the dog of Sam,” “the car of Sam,” “the wife of Sam,” are expressions that are grammatically equivalent to “the church of Christ.” Are they exclusive proper names? Not at all. The proper name of “the dog of Sam” may be Fido; the proper name of “the car of Sam” is Honda. The proper name of “the wife of Sam” is Patsy! Dog, car, and wife of Sam are not proper names; they show relationship or ownership. So with the terms in the New Testament.

Some who disagree with this argue, “If we don’t call it ‘church of Christ,’ the traveling brethren won’t know who we are!” Is this an argument for its use, or against its use? By the use of a

standardized name, do we seek an affiliation larger than a local church after all? Whether we do or not, the expression can well work against the exclusive use of even Biblical terminology. Many understand the exclusive use of “church of Christ,” to align one with congregations we are not in fellowship with, nor would we conscientiously be if we could.

While we appreciate the zeal of those who want to call Bible things by Bible names, the popular terms are not used exclusively, and we should not insist on them. As one writer observed, “The main problem in speaking about the church is not confusing the church with a building. A far more serious problem is confusing the church with a denomination!”

### **“Church of Christ” as an Adjective**

Just about every time the term church of Christ is used as an adjective, it’s used in a denominational sense. If one is said to be a “church of Christ preacher,” no one really believes he preaches as an agent of the universal church, for the universal church has no spokesman. No one seems to care if he speaks only for a local church. Most likely, the thought is that he preaches for a coalition of congregations, a thoroughgoing denominational concept.

Years ago, in an announcement concerning a debate between a preacher in a Sabbatarian denomination and myself, it was said he represented the Seventh-day Church of God, and I represented the Church of Christ. Although neither of us represented the universal church, he represented a denominational coalition of congregations. Sad to say, the language of the announcement said I did, too! Even worse, the concept in my mind was denominational as well, as I didn’t consider myself as representing just a local congregation of Christians.

The same thing could be said of “church of Christ” songbooks, colleges, etc. Those aren’t imagined as belonging to just a local church, and no one believes they belong to the universal church,

including both living and dead saints. They are generally thought of as belonging to a coalition of congregations.

These remarks are not given merely to be picky. We need to appreciate the fact that a great number of people are looking for just simple nondenominational service of God. They may not realize that many others try to be just Christians without the denominational teachings, organization, allegiance, creeds, etc. Let's not hide a nondenominational approach from them with denominational concepts and language.



## **Graham's Second Affirmative**

ALL CONGREGATIONS THAT FOLLOW THE SAME DOCTRINE AND CHOOSE TO STRICTLY ADHERE TO THE SAME AND ONLY SPECIFIC OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT NAME SUCH AS (C/church of God Acts 20:28) MAKES THOSE CONGREGATIONS A DENOMINATION.

AFFIRM: LYNN GRAHAM

DENY: SAMUEL G. DAWSON

DENOMINATION- [3.] NAME, DESIGNATION, a general name for a category. [4.] a religious organization uniting local congregations in a single, legal and administrative body.

DENOMINATIONALISM- [1.] devotion to denominational principles or interests. [2.] the emphasizing of denominational differences to the point of being narrowly exclusive SECTARIANISM. (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 10th ed.)

Thank you for your timely response to my 1st affirmative Samuel. It shows that this discussion is not going to drag!

In your 1st Negative you begin to address my 1st Affirmative after a fairly lengthy introduction, so I am numbering your paragraphs under the sentence where you said; "Now, to address Lynn's first Affirmative."

In the 2nd paragraph you stated; "AS WE'LL SEE, THE BIBLE SPECIFIES NO EXCLUSIVE NAME FOR A CONGREGATION." In the following paragraph following your 6th and final question to me you state the following: "I DON'T AGREE AT ALL CONGREGATIONS IN THE BIBLE HAD 'the same and only specific name.' THERE IS NO EXCLUSIVE PROPER NAME FOR A LOCAL CHURCH."

Now notice how you answered these two questions Samuel.....

1. If a church advertises it's name as 'church of the Firstborn' yet to your satisfaction practices everthing else according to scripture, is it still a Denomination? Yes or No

Samuel, you said; "ABSOLUTELY NOT, EVEN THOUGH IT IS CLEARLY NAMED."

2. Would you recommend full fellowship with that church? Yes or No

Samuel, you said; "More than likely, but it probably wouldn't be too long before I addressed their UNSCRIPTUAL NAME, which is what I'll be doing in this debate as well."

Your 3rd paragraph, Samuel, reads as follows: "Lynn speaks of the problem we have when traveling if we can't find the name on the building or in the Yellow Pages. Is worshipping with a congregation you know so little about even a duty that is enjoined on us by Christ? It's been my practice, but are we obligated to worship with a congregation we're not in fellowship with? If we are, where is the passage?"

Well Samuel, I would like to know the passage of scripture that prohibits long travel by members of a local congregation, for fear that they might possibly find themselves worshipping with a far away congregation in which they may not be aware that they are not supposed to be fellowshiping with? Maybe congregations can avoid the possibility of that happening by providing their

traveling members with a list of congregations that the Home congregation is in fellowship with. Like a CHURCH DIRECTORY.

In the 7th paragraph, Samuel, you stated; "On the doctrinal side, Lynn asks, 'How do congregations all follow the same doctrine today...?' My response is, 'Why should they even try?' Is that part of the work of the local church, to make sure it lines up with other congregations doctrinally? Where does the New Testament teach that? Eventually, we'll see that in the non-denominational way of Christ, we have no work larger than a local church, and that one congregation may serve the Lord fully, faithfully, and scripturally without ever knowing that another congregation exists!"

Samuel, no, that is not 'part of the work' of the local church. That is 'part of the work' of church papers, Colleges and congregations that host brotherhood lectureships. congregations that host Gospel Meetings, and Schools of Preaching.

In the 8th paragraph, Samuel, you stated; "Lynn says that 1Cor.1:10-15 teaches that it is unscriptural to name churches and church practices. Read the verse for yourself. There's absolutely nothing about naming churches in it!" No, Samuel, what I say is that this passage teaches that it is unscriptural to name churches and church practices after men.

In the 9th paragraph, Samuel, you stated; "Lynn asserts that the only church that was ever non-denominational was the church of the 1st century. Do all of the readers believe that statement to be true? If true, and Lynn is a member of a church, he's a member of a denomination. Statements like this make me wonder if Lynn is opposed to denominationalism. Please remember to answer that question for us, Lynn." Of course I am opposed to denominationalism, but, we have to recognize that the word sees all congregations as a cluster of Christian religions divided by names and doctrines. The churches of the Restoration Movement also consider other congregations of that movement as no more than Denominations as well, who differ with them on doctrinal issues

such as MDR, Holy Spirit Indwelling, Institutionism, cups and classes, etc.

Now to your questions addressed to me.

The answer to the 2nd question answers the 1st, 3rd, and 4th questions also. Now here is question #2.....WOULD TWO CONGREGATIONS SIMULTANEOUSLY FOLLOWING THE NEW TESTAMENT, ONE IN AFRICA AND ONE IN CALIFORNIA, CONSTITUTE A DENOMINATION, EVEN IF THEY NEVER HAD CONTACT, AND DIDN'T EVEN SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE? If they were the only 2 congregations in existence and did not match Webster's definition, then they would not be classified as Denominations.

#5. IF TWO CONGREGATIONS BOTH ADHERED TO THE NEW TESTAMENT, YET ONE HAD AN UNSCRIPTURAL NAME, WOULD YOU ADVISE THE ONE WITH THE UNSCRIPTURAL NAME TO ADAPT A SCRIPTURAL NAME LIKE THE OTHER CONGREGATIONS, THUS BECOMING (according to your proposition) A DENOMINATION, OR SHOULD THEY AVOID BECOMING A DENOMINATION BY RETAINING THEIR UNSCRIPTURAL NAME? Well Samuel, I agree with you, that "There is no exclusive proper name for a local church." So the question is irrelevant.

#6. WOULD THE CONGREGATIONS FOLLOWING WHAT PAUL TAUGHT EVERYWHERE THE SAME THING (1Cor.4:17) BE CONSIDERED A DENOMINATION IF THEY WERE CALLED BY THE SAME NAME? If there was a Webster's back then, those congregations would not have match Webster's definition of either Denomination nor Denominationalism.

I will end my 2nd Affirmative now and await the response from Samuel.



## **Dawson's Second Negative**

All congregations that follow the same doctrine and choose to strictly adhere to the same and only specific Old or New Testament name such as (Church/church of God Acts 20:28) makes those congregations a Denomination

Affirm: Lynn Graham

Deny: Samuel G. Dawson

I appreciate hearing from Lynn again, and admire his willingness to explore this subject in this forum. Reviewing his second affirmative, I can detect no new affirmative argument or material.

While awaiting Lynn's second affirmative, I made a list of items I wanted to particularly note Lynn's reaction to in my first negative. This list would probably be of use to other readers, as well.

1. Is he opposed to denominationalism?

Lynn answered in the affirmative, to which I say, glad to hear it, and I'll be glad to support your efforts at such. I wasn't meaning any disrespect, or calling your dedication to such into question. I just didn't know.

2. I criticized Webster for religious definitions. Did he respond?

Not that I saw. Instead, he seems to rely on Webster even more. This is evidently not a long-term position for Lynn, for he wrote me after I had accepted his challenge, "I have NEVER

heard or read a clear definition of what a real Denomination is in comparison with churches of the Restoration movement.”

I thought at the time that I wouldn't be challenging anyone for a debate about the meaning of a word I had never heard or read a clear definition of.”

Lynn, in the affirmative part of these exchange, I'll certainly discuss the definition of denomination and trace its use through the restoration movement, and I'm confident you'll appreciate my treatment of it.

### 3. Do we have an obligation to worship when traveling?

Lynn says, “I would like to know the passage of scripture that prohibits long travel by members of a local congregation, for fear that they might possibly find themselves worshipping with a far away congregation in which they may not be aware that they are not supposed to be fellowshiping with? Maybe congregations can avoid the possibility of that happening by providing their traveling members with a list of congregations that the Home congregation is in fellowship with. Like a CHURCH DIRECTORY.”

Did I say that members of a local church shouldn't travel a long way? Where did that come from? I have no problem with the use of a church directory if someone wants to worship with other saints while he's traveling, although I do know that many traveling Christians spend more energy to visit a congregation they're not in fellowship with than they do working with the one they actually belong to!. I merely asked if this was a scriptural obligation. I'm still asking. Perhaps the person who is running the travel service if he can give a scripture for it, because Lynn hasn't.

Lynn, I asked you for a scripture substantiating one's obligation to worship with a congregation he's not in fellowship with when he's traveling. Instead of that you asked me that prohibits long travel. I'm not aware of such a passage, don't believe the

concept, and never taught such in my life. I'm sure if I had asked you for a passage teaching baptism for the remission of sins, you'd have given it to me directly. Your argument that "Today, with all the different practices of congregations that profess to follow Christ, it is impossible NOT to Denominate in order to find the congregation whose practice we are familiar with" remains entirely unsubstantiated by scripture.

4. Congregations making replicas all over the world?

I asked for the scriptural basis of his assertions that congregations do this, and received no answer. I thought the New Testament was to be the pattern, not some local church. There are some mighty fine local churches, but I doubt that any of us (or them!) would want to create exact replicas of them anywhere, much less all the world. We realize that a local church is not our standard or blueprint, but the New Testament is.

5. I agreed no earthly headquarters is needed for a denomination.

We're agreed on this.

6. Why should congregations even try to follow the same doctrine?

I asked Lynn if it was a work of a local church to even try to line up with other churches doctrinally, and if so, where was the passage that taught such? His reply: "no, that is not 'part of the work' of the local church. That is 'part of the work' of church papers, Colleges and congregations that host brotherhood lectureships. congregations that host Gospel Meetings, and Schools of Preaching."

Lynn, what you say is factual, sad to say, but it's certainly not Biblical truth. If I can't get a passage that teaches that local churches ought to line up with other churches doctrinally, what about a passage that says lining churches up doctrinally is a work of papers, colleges, brotherhood lectureships, etc.?

When I'm in the affirmative, I'll show that any work larger than a local church tends to be denominational, and of course, papers, colleges, and preachers are three things that tend to act in a realm larger than a local church. These very influences contribute a great deal to our denominational thinking, as we'll see.

7. I Cor. 1.10-15 – not divisions into denominations, but within a local church.

I said this passage said nothing about denominational divisions, but divisions within the local church at Corinth. Lynn's response: "No, Samuel, what I say is that this passage teaches that it is unscriptural to name churches and church practices after men."

Lynn, we all know that's what you say. We'd be a lot more interested in your finding where the Bible says it! Please read it again. Can you find a denominational division anywhere in it? It still won't be even if you again say, "No, Samuel, what I say is that this passage teaches that it is unscriptural to name churches and church practices after men." I'm sure you're a mighty fine fellow, but what you say it not what we're to go by, is it? We're not arguing here about what the Bible says, but what it doesn't say, aren't we?

8. If the only nondenominational church was in first century, is Lynn a member of a denomination?

After thinking about Lynn's statement, I may have misunderstood Lynn's point, and that he thinks he's a member of the first century church, in the universal sense. If that's not the case, then he's affirming that any church now is denominational, including the one he works in, and where you are a member.

Then he says, "we have to recognize that the word sees all congregations as a cluster of Christian religions divided by names and doctrines."

I'm sorry, but I cannot understand this last statement. "The word sees all congregations as a cluster of Christian religions" Does anyone understand what that means? Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but what are Christian religions?

9. Any problem with my answers to his questions?

He quoted my answers to his first two questions, but made not one comment about them, and didn't even quote my answer to his third question. Lynn, with all due respect, if you don't want to comment on my answers, you don't have to go to the trouble to quote them, or even ask the questions, for that matter.

10. His answers to my questions

Lynn didn't answer questions 1, 3, and 4, saying his answer to question would suffice for them.

1. QUESTION: Would two such congregations, one of which existed two centuries before the other, constitute a denomination?

Two "such" congregations are the congregations of Lynn's definition, with the same name and doctrine. According to his definition, two congregations with the same name and doctrine don't even have to exist at the same time to constitute a denomination. When we learn what a denomination really is, not just a common name and doctrine, we'll see even more how lacking Lynn's and Webster's definition is.

2. QUESTION: Would two congregations simultaneously following the New Testament, one in Africa and one in California, constitute a denomination, even if they never had contact, and didn't even speak the same language?

According to Lynn's definition given in his proposition, they are. In the affirmative, we'll see that they can't possibly be, with never any contact necessary to have denominational action.

Think what that means, practically, friends. Here are two congregations, don't even know the other exists, both just trying to go by the Bible, and they still end up being a denomination! What that means is that we should all just give up striving to be nondenominational Christians, for if there's another congregation in Timbuktu that understands the New Testament like we do, and happen to call themselves by the same name, we're going to end up a denomination anyway! If Lynn is right, we're all doomed to denominationalism! Who can believe it?

3. QUESTION: Would two such congregations having never heard of each other and had no functional connection constitute a denomination?

Again, according to Lynn's definition given in his proposition they are, yet they can't possibly be with no contact and functional connection, as we will see in the affirmative.

4. QUESTION: Would two such congregations never engaging in collective action constitute a denomination?

According to Lynn's definition and proposition, they would be, but with no denominational action, they couldn't possibly be.

5. QUESTION: If two congregations both adhered to the New Testament, yet one had an unscriptural name, would you advise the one with the unscriptural name to adapt a scriptural name like the other congregations, thus becoming (according to your proposition) a denomination, or should they avoid becoming a denomination by retaining their unscriptural name?

Lynn's answer: "Well Samuel, I agree with you, that "There is no exclusive proper name for a local church." So the question is irrelevant."

This really clears things up, doesn't it? I didn't even say anything about an exclusive proper name in my question! He could just as well have said, "Well, Samuel, I agree with you, that

Fords are better than Chevys, so the question is irrelevant"! It would have exactly as much sense.

Lynns affirming all congregations following same doctrine and strictly adhering TO THE SAME AND ONLY SPECIFIC OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT NAME (emphasis mine--SGD) makes those congregations a denomination. So I take the congregations of his proposition, and then he says, "There is no exclusive proper name." Lynn, I would have said anything about the specific name if you hadn't had "the same and only specific Old or New Testament name." Now you deny that there is an exclusive proper name. So, to answer this question, Lynn denies the wording of his proposition and declares the question irrelevant!

6. QUESTION: Would the congregations following what Paul taught everywhere the same thing (1 Cor. 4:17) be considered a denomination if they were called by the same name?

I asked this question because the churches Paul taught everywhere the same thing fit Webster's and Lynn's definition of a denomination, and Lynn disagrees saying, "If there was a Webster's back then, those congregations would not have match (sic) Webster's definition of either Denomination or Denominationalism."

Lynn, if there was a Webster's back then and brethren were using it for their standard as you are, they would have been calling sprinkling and pouring baptism, too!

These churches Paul taught match the definition of your proposition! "ALL CONGREGATIONS THAT FOLLOW THE SAME DOCTRINE AND CHOOSE TO STRICTLY ADHERE TO THE SAME AND ONLY SPECIFIC OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT NAME SUCH AS (C/church of God Acts 20:28) MAKES THOSE CONGREGATIONS A DENOMINATION"

But then you've also said that the only nondenominational church existed in the first century. Were these churches a denomination per your definition, or not?

### 11. His Response to my “no specific name”

At one point, Lynn agrees that there is no exclusive proper name, but his proposition affirms that “ALL CONGREGATIONS THAT FOLLOW THE SAME DOCTRINE AND CHOOSE TO STRICTLY ADHERE TO THE SAME AND ONLY SPECIFIC OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT NAME SUCH AS (C/church of God Acts 20:28) MAKES THOSE CONGREGATIONS A DENOMINATION”

12. His response to church of Christ (with no article “The” or “A”) not making sense

No response.

13. Any response to Church of Christ as an adjective not making sense:

No response

Lynn gave no new affirmative material. His next exchange will be his last affirmative. So far, we’ve got

1. an argument from Webster, an unreliable source for definitions of religious terms, who Lynn doesn’t accept consistently,

2. an argument based on the traveling brethren, which he can’t prove is even a Biblical obligation,

3.the replicas of congregations argument, for which no scripture is given,

4. that congregations need to line up doctrinally, which Lynn admits is not a work of the church, but of papers, colleges, and Schools of preaching (for which no scripture can be given),



5. his insistence that I Cor. 1.10-15 condemns denominational divisions even though there's not a denomination in the passage, nor in Corinth, nor anywhere in the world for hundreds of years, and

6. his answers to my questions, every one of which disagrees with his proposition!

Thanks for your efforts, Lynn, as we pray that our efforts will be spiritually profitable both to ourselves, and to our readers.



## **Graham's Third Affirmative**

ALL CONGREGATIONS THAT FOLLOW THE SAME DOCTRINE AND CHOOSE TO STRICTLY ADHERE TO THE SAME AND ONLY SPECIFIC OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT NAME SUCH AS (C/church of God Acts 20:28) MAKES THOSE CONGREGATIONS A DENOMINATION.

AFFIRM: LYNN GRAHAM

DENY: SAMUEL G. DAWSON

DENOMINATION: [3.] NAME, DESIGNATION, a general name for a category. [4.] a religious organization uniting local congregations in a single, legal and administrative body.

DENOMINATIONALISM: [1.] devotion to denominational principles or interests. [2.] the emphasizing of denominational differences to the point of being narrowly exclusive SECTARIANISM.

Thank you so very much for your swift responses to my affirmatives Samuel! This discussion is going very fast! I have included Webster's definition for Denomination and Denominationalism in order to have a specific point of reference. Many congregations and churches (universal) claim to not be a Denomination. But according to the only point of reference, which is Webster's definition, they are.

Do all of the different sects of the Restoration Movement (RM) match Webster's definition of Denomination or Denominationalism? Do just a few or just one? Do NONE of them

match the definition? So far in this discussion, they ALL do. The only defense they have, and all those churches outside the RM included, is that they SAY they are NOT Denominations.

There appeared an interesting idea in this discussion concerning the name C/church of Christ. In order to avoid Webster's definition and the clutches of the proposition, you think by using an adjective as in.....'a church of Christ' will help. Well Samuel, are the churches that would (or already do) go by the name....'a church of God' or 'a church of the Firstborn' be ok with you?

Samuel, you state: "Lynn, I asked you for a scripture substantiating one's obligation to worship with a congregation he/she is not in fellowship with when they are traveling." I then mentioned the CHURCH DIRECTORY in my 2nd Affirmative and you had no qualms with that. Well Samuel, where is the scriptural authority for the Home congregations to decide for each of it's members what other congregations are off limits to them? I have seen these scriptures printed in RM church papers and used against 'offending' congregations in many church papers; "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." (Rom.16:17) "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." (2Jn.9)

Notice here, like you notice of 1Cor.1:10-15, that it is dealing with individuals and not an entire congregation or church (universal). Samuel, do you believe it to be unscriptural for an entire congregation to use these scriptures against another congregation or church (universal)?

In your question #6 to me you ask: "Why should congregations even try to follow the same doctrine? I asked Lynn if it was a work of the local church to even try to line up with other churches doctrinally, and if so, where was the passage that taught such? His reply: "...no, that is not 'part of the work' of the local

church...that is 'part of the work' of church papers, Colleges, and congregations that host brotherhood lectureships, congregations that host Gospel Meetings, and Schools of Preaching." Samuel, you then said; "Lynn what you say is factual, sad to say, but it's certainly not Biblical truth. If I can't get a passage that teaches that local churches ought to line up with other congregations doctrinally, what about a passage that says lining up churches doctrinally is a work of papers, colleges, brotherhood lectureships, etc.?" Well Samuel, if it's none of the business of the 'local church' to know if another congregation or church (universal) out there lines up doctrinally with it.....what's up with the CHURCH DIRECTORIES and the 'congregations not in fellowship' thing?

To my understanding, you are the only RM debator that sees nothing wrong with churches naming themselves and their practices after men even in the light of 1Cor.1:10-15. Apparently Samuel, it is ok for any congregation, church (universal) to refer to itself as Lutheran....as long as none of their individual members refers to him/herself as a Lutheran.

You say, Samuel; "I'm sorry, but I cannot understand this last statement, 'The world sees all congregations as a cluster of Christian religions' Does anyone understand what that means? Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but what are Christian religions?" What a Christian religion is to a person who grew up with no religious upbringing, is a religion that centers around a great religious figure named Jesus Christ. These churches each have their own practice of following Him such as some meeting on Saturdays but most meeting on Sundays. Some practice sprinkling for baptism while others immerse, some teach that one somehow reaches the blood of Christ in order to be forgiven of past sins by just believing and saying a prayer while others teach that you must repent and be baptized in order to reach forgiveness. Etc., etc.

In question #5 Samuel, you asked me; "If two congregations both adhered to the New Testament, yet one had an unscriptural name, would you advise the one with the unscriptural name to

adapt a scriptural name like the other congregations, thus becoming (according to your proposition) a denomination, or should they avoid becoming a denomination by retaining their unscriptural name?" UNSCRIPTURAL name? My proposition reads: (All congregations that follow the same doctrine and choose to strictly adhere to THE SAME AND ONLY SPECIFIC OLD OR NEW TESTAMENT NAME such as (C/church of God Acts 20:28) makes those congregations a Denomination) Notice I said SPECIFIC name.....not.....UNSCRIPTURAL name.

In your question #6 to me you ask; "Would the congregations following what Paul taught everywhere the same thing (1Cor.4:17) be considered a denomination if they were called by the same name?"I answered....."If there was a Webster's back then, those congregations would not have matched Webster's definition of either Denomination or Denominational."("...if they were called by the same name?") They were not however.The reason those congregations would not have matched Webster's definition of Denomination or Denominational is because the congregations back then were not trying to DESIGNATE (to indicate and set apart for a specific purpose, office or duty) from each other. Nor were they trying to emphasize differences between themselves to the point of being narrowly exclusive of each other. For instance, Paul told the church at Rome that the churches of Christ saluted them. (Rom.16:16) So let's say that from then on they referred to themselves as the church of Christ.....as opposed to.....the church in Ephesus which called itself the church of God. (Acts 20:28) That however did not happen, so Webster's definition cannot apply.

In summary:

The use of Webster's Dictionary is the correct point of reference in which to start a discussion on Denominations and Denominationalism, even though the discussion is Biblical in nature because Christian Denominations did not exist in the New Testament as they do now.

If it is none of the local church's business if any other congregation lines up doctrinally with it, then what business is it of that congregation if any of its traveling members worship at some congregation that does not line up doctrinally with it?

It was the purpose that church papers were created in the beginning of the RM, to ensure that the congregations were uniform to the doctrine of the New Testament as they saw fit. Notice how in some church papers today how they seek to be the brotherhood spokesman to sound warning of any congregation that strays from a doctrinal path. These church papers exist in every RM sect.

If (1Cor.1:10-15) does not teach that it is not only unscriptural for individual Christians to attach men's names to themselves or their practices, but that it also teaches that it is unscriptural for the congregation and the church (universal) to do so as well, then the RM church (universal) needs to apologize to a great many Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, etc., etc. Because I have yet to read of a debate where one of these RM preachers refrained from unleashing it upon any of them when the propositions so required.

The only time that there were no Denominations was in the 1st century.....according to Webster's Dictionary definition of the term. The church at Rome did not try to DESIGNATE (to indicate and set apart for a specific purpose, office, or duty) or EXCLUDE itself from the church of Ephesus by practice or by seizing and adopting a name out of Paul's letter to them. (Rom.16:16) Likewise, the church at Ephesus did not do that to the church at Rome. (Acts 20:28) However, if there were Baptist, Lutheran and other churches in existence back then along with the 1st century congregations established by the Apostles, then they would ALL fall under Webster's definition.

I will close for now and let Samuel quickly respond.

Lynn Graham





## **Dawson's Third Negative**

All congregations that follow the same doctrine and choose to strictly adhere to the same and only specific Old or New Testament name such as (Church/church of God Acts 20:28) makes those congregations a Denomination

Affirm: Lynn Graham

Deny: Samuel G. Dawson

Thanks for your last affirmative, Lynn. Your efforts are very much appreciated. I admire your ability to contend for what you believe without being contentious about it. You've not once impugned my motives, misrepresented me, or questioned my love for the Lord, for which you have my gratitude. The Lord doesn't really need either Lynn or Sam to teach him what constitutes a denomination, but he does need us to behave ourselves toward each other while we try to sort the concept out. You've certainly done your part in that regard in this discussion.

I'll now fulfill my obligation to critique your affirmative.

I can understand your using Webster as a specific point of reference on the subject. However, when you say that it's the only point of reference, I beg to differ, especially since you were saying less than five months ago "I have NEVER heard or read a clear definition of what a real Denomination is in comparison with churches of the Restoration movement." Sometime after that, you looked the word up in Webster, and now you think it's "the only point of reference." With due respect, Lynn, it might just be that some others have done way more thinking and writing on this subject than you're giving them credit for. I'm greatly

appreciative of the opportunity to discuss the subject with you, but it might have been well for you to have done a little more work on the subject before you started issuing challenges for debate.

You say that according to Webster's definition, all the sects of the restoration movement are denominations. Please permit me to defer on this point until I'm in the affirmative, where I'm sure you'll appreciate my take on the denominational trends in the restoration movement. If you've got any problems with my answer on this question, I'll be glad to take them up then. For now, I'll just say that there is way too much denominational thinking, and sometimes action, in all parts of the restoration movement, but not because of Webster's definition. I also think you'll see that I don't support a molecule of it.

Lynn, you misunderstood why I brought up the fact that the term "church of Christ" is meaningless without an article. It wasn't to avoid Webster's definition, nor to escape the "clutches" of your proposition, which is way too simplistic. If my fear of the clutches of Webster's definition turned to leather, you couldn't saddle a June bug with it! I brought it up because it doesn't make sense, scripturally. No one knows what the term "church of Christ" means. In my opinion, it may just be that people don't want to say "a church of Christ" because that implies there more than one. Of course, there is just one universal church, but there are thousands of local churches, and it's ok to admit that. "The church of Christ" refers to the universal church, "a church of Christ" refers to a local church, but what does the term "church of Christ" mean? It never occurs in scripture.

When you ask whether "a church of God" or "a church of the Firstborn" be ok with me, I answer, if they were applied to a local church, by all means, again with the caveat that "the firstborn" in the New Testament is plural, not referring to Christ, but to the "firstborn ones," i.e., Christians.

You refer to my asking for scripture teaching an obligation to worship with a congregation one is not in fellowship with when

traveling (which scripture is still missing) but then that I have no qualms about church directories. Lynn, everyone has qualms with church directories. Even those who publish them realize they can't vouch for the faithfulness of the congregations contained in them. I don't argue against them scripturally; I merely asserted that they should point out the scripture that teaches the obligation to worship when traveling, which was the basis of one of your arguments about what constitutes a denomination.

When you ask where is authority is for the Home congregations to decide for each of its members what other congregations are off limits to them?" I answer that there is none. You should have guessed this when I said I didn't know why those brethren felt obligated to worship when traveling in the first place! If you had just given a passage demonstrating that obligation, Lynn, you wouldn't have to be engaging in all this sophistry.

In his first affirmative, Lynn brought about the necessity of names when Christians are traveling away from home. I asked where the Bible enjoined Christians to worship with a congregation they're not in fellowship with when traveling. In his second affirmative, instead of giving us a passage, he then asked for a passage prohibiting long travel by members of a local congregation. I replied that I didn't even believe that? Now in his third affirmative, he brings more passages, asking whether I think they authorize one church to mark another one, but he's still given no passage for his assertion about traveling brethren from his first affirmative. If he can dodge the question in his last affirmative, he'll be home free! Lynn, I think the readers will understand if I refuse to chase down any more of your detours until you give Bible teaching obligating traveling Christians to worship with a congregation they're not even in fellowship with.

When you ask, "what's up with the CHURCH DIRECTORIES and the 'congregations not in fellowship' thing? My answer, Lynn, is that someone is way too interested in the brotherhood, more accurately, congregationhood, and probably not interested enough in the independence of his own local

church, and it's work. Remember, I'm the one who brought this subject up. It's not a weakness of my position, but of yours.

Lynn says that I'm the only "RM debater" (that's restoration movement debater) that sees something wrong with his use of I Cor. 1.10-15. Lynn, it's much worse than you think. I'm not even in the restoration movement, nor any other movement consisting of congregations! My friend, you can't imagine how many things I believe that are not commonly held by heirs of the restoration movement, and how little that weighs on me. When you see my affirmative material, you won't be involved with such a movement either if you want to avoid denominationalism. As we'll see, the restoration movement was denominational to the core.

If all the church papers and debaters in the restoration movement agree with you, they should be able to help you come up with one passage that demonstrates the obligation of traveling brethren to worship with congregations they're not in fellowship with. That should get you enough help. If not, you might try the colleges, preacher training schools, religious papers, and brotherhood lectureships. If they fail you, you can always go back to Webster! Mark it well, I have no problem with a traveling brother who wants to worship with such a church, I've done it plenty myself. But if someone comes along preaching it as an obligation, it's time to ask for the passage. This is the third time I've asked for it, and still no answer.

I'm sure all the readers can see that when I don't agree with your use of I Cor. 1.10-15, that necessarily implies that I think it's ok for any congregation, church (universal) to refer to itself as Lutheran. Anybody who comes to that conclusion doesn't even have to be baptized.

I think the reader can judge that my comments on your answers to my questions #5 and 6 stand.

### **Review of Your "Summary"**

In your summary, you assert that Webster is a correct point of reference “because Christian Denominations did not exist in the New Testament as they do now.” Again, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but what is a Christian Denomination? Have you been reading Webster again? I’ll bet he uses that language. I don’t, and be assured the Bible doesn’t.

Again in your summary, you ask, “If it is none of the local church’s business if any other congregation lines up doctrinally with it, then what business is it of that congregation if any of it’s traveling members worship at some congregation that does not line up doctrinally with it?” I answer, “It not their home congregation’s business.” If you just had a passage for your contention, you wouldn’t have to resort to this, Lynn.

When you assert that “It was the purpose that church papers were created in the beginning of the RM, to ensure that the congregations were uniform to the doctrine of the New Testament as they saw fit,” I answer that if true, that is one great reason why the restoration movement was so denominational. By the end of my second affirmative, you’ll see why I say that. My guess is that you’ll agree with it, too.

When you then say, “Notice how in some church papers today how they seek to be the brotherhood spokesman to sound warning of any congregation that strays from a doctrinal path,” I answer that that is one great reason why most in churches of Christ now are so denominational in their thinking and action. By the end of my third affirmative, you’ll see why I say that. My guess is that you’ll agree with it, too.

Lynn, you’re not being careful to represent my position on I Cor. 1.10-15. All I said was, the passage wasn’t speaking of denominational divisions but divisions within the local church at Corinth. Of course, Paul wasn’t addressing a problem that

wouldn't exist for another 500 years, but one that existed in Corinth right then.

### **Conclusion**

While I continue to appreciate Lynn's efforts to sustain his definition of a denomination, I'm afraid he hasn't made his case with:

1. an argument from Webster, an unreliable source for definitions of religious terms, who Lynn doesn't accept consistently,

2. an argument based on the traveling brethren, which he can't prove is even a Biblical obligation,

3. the replicas of congregations argument, for which no scripture is given,

4. an argument that congregations need to line up doctrinally, which Lynn admits is not a work of the church, but of papers, colleges, and Schools of preaching (for which no scripture can be given),

5. his insistence that I Cor. 1.10-15 condemns denominational divisions even though there's not a denomination in the passage, nor would there be in Corinth, nor anywhere in the world for hundreds of years, and

6. his answers to my questions, every one of which disagrees with his proposition!

- a. According to his definition, two congregations with the same name and doctrine don't even have to exist in the same century to constitute a denomination. Who ever saw such a denomination? Thus if the congregation we work with has a certain name and doctrine, we may be pleasing to God, but if several centuries later, another

congregation on another continent arrives at the same doctrine and happens to use that same name, our congregation is now part of a denomination! This one observation renders the goal of the nondenominational way of Christ an absolute impossibility!

b. According to his definition, two congregations with the same name and doctrine who don't know each other and never function together constitute a denomination. Who ever saw such a denomination?

c. According to his definition, two congregations with the same name and doctrine that never engage in collective action constitute a denomination. Who ever saw such a denomination?

d. Lynn couldn't tell two congregations what to do if they both adhered to the New Testament, but one had an unscriptural name, whether he would advise the one with the unscriptural name to adapt a scriptural one, thus becoming (according to his definition) a denomination, or whether they should avoid becoming a denomination by retaining their unscriptural name. If I couldn't offer these two congregations anything but unscriptural alternatives, I would declare this question irrelevant too!

e. Lynn said that the congregations following what Paul taught everywhere the same thing (I Cor. 4.17) would not be considered a denomination "if there was a Webster's back then" yet these congregations fit his proposition exactly, having the same name and doctrine!

f. Lynn's proposition affirms that there is a single specific name for the Lord's church, but then he also says he agrees that there is no exclusive proper name for the Lord's church. Which one of these positions do you agree with? Surely you can't agree with both of them, yet Lynn does!

7. His “Christian Denominations” argument, which would be more suitable in a class on first principles. That class will begin with my first affirmative.

In the following affirmative, we’ll develop a definition of “denomination” that will satisfy Lynn’s curiosity about the restoration movement. It will also avoid every single one of the problems with Lynn’s definition as seen in this conclusion.



## **Dawson's First Affirmative**

Proposition: Two congregations following the same doctrine and having the same name do not necessarily constitute a denomination.

Affirm: Samuel G. Dawson

Deny: Lynn Graham

I again wish to express my appreciation to those who own and manage this forum for providing the opportunity for Lynn and I to have this exchange. I especially wish to thank Lynn for his participation. Lynn and I are not enemies, and really not even opponents. We are both in opposition to religious division as a work of the flesh, and both of us strive to teach and plea for all to serve Christ without denominational allegiance. For now, Lynn and I merely disagree on the definition of a denomination, and this is probably only a temporary situation. I also appreciate those reading this exchange, and hope this study is profitable for you in your service of Christ. To those who are already Christians without denominational allegiance, we hope this study will help us understand some denominational thinking in churches of Christ so that we can avoid the perils of the very thing we're striving to avoid.

### **I. Developing the Definition of "Denomination"**

So far in this debate, my duty has been to examine Lynn's arguments and see if he sustains his proposition. We now turn ourselves to a correct definition of a denomination. Let's face it, our concept of a denomination is usually no more than some

group that uses a denominational name or a denominational creed, and those things will be present most of the time. But, to obtain a better definition, we first examine the relationship between local churches and the universal church. Our concept of the relationship between these two churches will profoundly affect us.

## **A. The Relationship of the Universal Church and the Local Church--What It Is Not**

### **1. A Church of Denominations**

What is your view of the universal church? Of what is it composed? The most popular view in our time is the universal church, the body of Christ, composed of denominations. Of course, this view is peculiar to recent centuries, for no one believes all these denominations existed in the New Testament. Certainly, no one thinks Jesus came to establish all these denominations, or that He did establish them. Likewise, no one thinks the apostles were members of any of them, or that they even existed in the time of Jesus and the apostles.

To justify the presence of denominations, people sometimes use Jn. 15.5, 6, where Jesus says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing. If a MAN abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

Jesus' own words show He does not speak of a tree composed of branches that are themselves denominations, for the branches He speaks of are "men." "If a MAN abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch." So the body of Christ, the universal church, is not composed of denominations.

## **2. A Church of Churches**

Some, including most of those in churches of Christ, I'm afraid, view the body of Christ as composed of local churches. Alexander Campbell, a leader in the restoration movement in America in the 1800s, apparently held this view of the body of Christ for quite a lengthy period of time, perhaps even dying with it. In the *Millennial Harbinger* of July 1834, he wrote:

"The church...is not one congregation or assembly, but the congregation of Christ, composed of Christ, composed of all the individual congregations on earth.

More than 20 years later, Campbell still held this view, for he said in the *Millennial Harbinger* of June 1853 (p. 303):

"Every individual church on earth stands to the whole church of Christ as one individual man to one particular church."

Such views should not surprise us. The only churches Campbell had been exposed to were churches composed of churches, i.e., denominations.

## **B. A Church of Churches Is a Denomination**

However, is Campbell's "church of churches" view of the body of Christ any more biblical than the denominational view? Again, Jn. 15.5-6 shows the body of Christ is not composed of congregations or local churches, but rather of individual Christians. The branches in Christ are MEN--not congregations, and not denominations. The basic issue is simply this: is the universal church a church of churches, or a church of people?

In I Cor. 12.12-13, Paul says, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all

baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit."

Evidently, Paul views the body of Christ as composed not of denominations (which were foreign to him), nor churches, but of individual Christians. In verse 27 he says, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof."

Perhaps this may seem like a trivial matter, but whether the body of Christ is composed of individual Christians or of individual congregations affects many of our fundamental beliefs about the nature of the church.

Now let's think about the different relationships in these two groups: (A) a single Christian, a plurality of Christians, a local church, and (B) a local church, a plurality of local churches, and a plurality of local churches acting collectively. We begin by illustrating the difference between a single chain link, several separate links, and a chain. The difference between several links and chain is the functional relationship between the links. A chain is more than just several links. It is several links that function as a unit.

Some see no distinction between an individual Christian and the local church, but Jesus made the distinction. For example, in Mt. 18.15-18, He says, "And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him ALONE (a single Christian—SGD): if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear THEM (a plurality of Christians—SGD), tell it unto THE CHURCH (a plurality of Christians functioning together—SGD)."

Jesus makes clear a distinction between an individual acting, several individuals acting, and the church acting. One who says, "Anything the individual can do, the church can do," fails to recognize the distinction the Lord Himself makes. Likewise, in I Tim. 5.16, Paul says, "If any woman that believeth hath widows,

let her relieve them, and let not the church be burdened: that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

This passage makes clear a distinction between an individual Christian acting, a plurality of Christians acting in their individual capacity, and a plurality of Christians acting collectively.

When we contemplate this concept on a local congregational level, we read of instances where a single local church acted in the New Testament. For example, in I Cor. 1.2, Paul speaks of the “church of God which is at Corinth,” obviously speaking of a single local congregation. When Paul writes Galatians, he addresses it “to the churches of Galatia,” a plurality of churches, each acting independently.

After the apostles, man invented the concept of a plurality of congregations acting collectively. A modern word describes this arrangement, although it isn’t a Bible word: the word is “denomination.” This is precisely what a denomination is: a plurality of churches acting collectively. For example, the Methodist denomination consists of all the churches that function collectively in that denomination. The Episcopal denomination is a collection of local churches that function collectively to do the work of that denomination. On and on the list goes. Collective action of local churches is denominational action!

### **C. Denomination Defined**

For an institution that has been among us for so long (approximately five hundred years), it is surprising how little many have reflected on just what a modern denomination is. Even among those who oppose the division and unbelief that denominationalism produces few have stopped to analyze exactly what it is.

## 1. A Religious Denomination Is Not Just Something “Named”

Webster defines a denomination as “The name of a class of things; a class or kind (especially of units) having a specific name or value.” Thus, we speak of currency consisting of several denominations: five-dollar bills, tens, etc. Each denomination of money consists of a category of bills.

However, a religious denomination then is more than something named. I have two children, both of whom have been named, but I am not the father of two denominations.

## 2. A Denomination Is an Organizational Concept

Donald G. Tinder, in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* gives the following definition of a denomination in the religious sense:

“Denominations are associations of congregations--though sometimes it might be said that congregations are localized subdivisions of denominations--that have a common heritage. Moreover, a true denomination does not claim to be the only legitimate expression of the church. (Donald G. Tinder, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Ed. Walter A. Elwell, Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing House, 1984, p. 310.)

Thus, a denomination is a collective of congregations. When congregations function as a unit, they function denominationally. Tinder admits our naiveté concerning the rise of the denominational concept:

“Even though denominations within Protestantism have come to be the largest expression of organized Christianity beyond the level of the congregation, there has never been much theological reflection on denomina-

tionalism. A look at theological textbooks or church creeds confirms this. Probably the simplest explanation for this omission is the Bible in no way envisages the organization of the church into denominations. It instead assumes the opposite, that all Christians--except those being disciplined--will be in full fellowship with all others. Any tendencies to the contrary were roundly denounced (I Cor. 1.10-13). Paul could write a letter to the Christians meeting in various places in Rome or Galatia with every assurance that all would receive the message. Today, for any city or country, he would have to place the letter as an advertisement in the secular media and hope. (*Ibid*, p. 310.)

Although it's not related to our proposition, there's another term we might mention for the benefit of all. Like "denomination," it's not a Biblical term, but what is the term for all denominations claiming allegiance to Christ? That's "Christianity" or "Christendom," isn't it? Several years ago, I was about to publish a book entitled, *Fellowship: with God & His People, Christianity Without Denominationalism*. A good friend of mine pointed out that the term "Christianity" wasn't a scriptural term, and that I should use a term that was. He pointed out that the New Testament uses terms like "the way of Christ," "the way of the Lord," and "the way." Listen to the way the world uses the term "Christianity," and you'll soon see that the term means, "the collection of all denominations." Now, Webster doesn't agree with this definition, but as we've seen, he's not a reliable lexicographer of terms pertaining to religion.

### **Conclusions Thus Far**

If this definition of a denomination is correct, then congregations acting collectively function as a denomination whether they have a common name or doctrine or not!

Two churches having the same name and doctrine do not constitute a denomination if they are not acting collectively.

Two churches having the same name and doctrine do not constitute a denomination if they are not components of larger “church.”

In our next affirmative, we’ll trace the concept of denominationalism down to, through, and after the restoration movement.

(While it is not within the scope of this exchange to develop the true composition of the universal church (not denominations, not churches), the interested reader should see *Fellowship: with God & His People, the Way of Christ Without Denominationalism, Second Edition*, Samuel G. Dawson, Amarillo, TX: Gospel Themes Press, 2004, [www.gospelthemes.com/fellow.htm](http://www.gospelthemes.com/fellow.htm))



## Graham's First Negative

Congregations following the same doctrine and having the same name do not necessarily constitute a denomination.

Affirm: Samuel G. Dawson

Deny: Lynn Graham

We now are on the turf where you thought you would fair better. Samuel, after reading over your 1st Affirmative, I don't think so. There are a number of things from your 1st Affirmative that I am going to address and I hope you don't feel that I am personally attacking you. I hope we can keep the same spirit now as when I was in the Affirmative.

Samuel, under the heading; Developing the Definition of "Denomination" you said; "We now turn ourselves to a correct definition of a denomination." I thought you were immediately going to let everyone (Webster's included) know what the correct definition of a denomination was. Instead, I found your definition much further into your affirmative under the heading; 'A Church of Churches Is a Denomination.' Samuel, you said; "This is precisely what a denomination is: a plurality of churches acting collectively." (notice you said.."precisely"..Samuel) Then you went on to say in that same paragraph; "For example, the Methodist denomination consists of all the churches that function collectively in that denomination. The Episcopal denomination is a collection of local churches that function collectively to do the work of that denomination. On and on the list goes. Collective action of local churches is a denominational action!" Well Samuel, you do understand that if those Methodist, Episcopal, Baptist, etc., churches decide to become autonomous and

suspend financial assistance to outside human institutions due to the proliferation of lawsuits against religious institutions today.....that they will no longer be considered Denominations according to your definition.

I have no qualms with anything under the heading; 'A Church of Denominations'.

Under the heading; 'A Church of Churches' and into the second heading...the 1st paragraph; I do not believe that any plurality of congregations are under obligation to collectively support any perpetual operation. So I agree with you in that section.

Under the heading; 'A Church of Churches' you quote 1Cor.12:12-13 "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of the one Spirit." I will proceed further because I think you say something that reflects by implication back on the understanding of this passage. Do you Samuel, understand 1Cor.12:12-13 this way...."For as the body (isolated local congregation), is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body (isolated local congregation), being many, are one body (isolated local congregation); so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body (isolated local congregation), whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of the one Spirit." Samuel, is this your understanding of this passage? Are individuals everywhere who have been baptized according to the scriptures, part of every isolated local congregation though not a member? Or do they have to be a member in order to be a part?

Under 'A Religious Denomination Is Not Just Something Named' I would have thought you had enough of Webster's from when I was in the Affirmative! So here goes again Samuel;

Denomination: [3.] NAME, DESIGNATION, a general name for a category. [4.] a religious organization uniting local congregations in a single, legal and administrative body.

Denominationalism: [1.] devotion to denominational principles or interests. [2.] the emphasizing of denominational differences to the point of being narrowly exclusive SECTARIANISM. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 10th ed.

The world outside of the sects that now make up what's left of the Restoration Movement, does not reach for such sources as 'The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology' to find a non-Biblical word such as Denomination or Denominationalism. They reach for their Webster's. Now if you think that a religious person would have a kinder, gentler definition that would help substantiate your proposition, which religious person would you choose? A scholar that is Catholic or Protestant? Of course you would choose the Protestant, and you did. Apparently your choice was on the faculty of Tyndale and was editor for Christianity Today for 10 years, so I suppose he would give a softer definition of Denomination and Denominationalism.

Samuel, I do not see your definition helpful to you because it clutches some of the churches in the New Testament. You say a Denomination is; "When congregations function as a unit, they function denominationally." Also; "This is precisely what a denomination is: a plurality of churches acting collectively." There is a passage that is an example of congregations functioning collectively. This preacher was chosen by God to plant, guide, and encourage congregations throughout most of the known world back in the first century. "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia (Timothy & Silas) supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep

myself." (2Cor.11:8-9) From this passage we see that many congregations were acting collectively or Denominationally.

Questions for Samuel:

1. If the Methodist and Espiscopal chuches become autonomous and suspend all collective financial support, do you believe that they would no longer be Denominations? Yes or No

2. Are individuals everywhere who have been baptized according to the scriptures, part of every isolated local congregation, though not members? Yes or No?

3. Would an individual who has been baptized according to the scriptures, have to be a member of an isolated local congregation before he/she could be a part? Yes or No?

4. Do to the vast numbers of people who became Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:21,24,26,) do you believe that those congregations became Denominations when they acted collectively by sending money to the congregation/s in Jerusalem who were suffering from a great famine? (Acts 11:27-30)

5. Do you believe that all the congregations that acted collectively in aiding Paul, Timothy, and Silas, became Denominations in so doing? Yes or No

## Dawson's Second Affirmative

Proposition: Two congregations following the same doctrine and having the same name do not necessarily constitute a denomination.

Affirm: Samuel G. Dawson

Deny: Lynn Graham

Lynn, I apologize for taking longer to respond than usual, however, I have one good excuse: I'm married.

Now that I've fully explained that, and since it will not take much space to respond to Lynn's negative, I'll make that response first.

Lynn first asserts that my being in the affirmative may be harder than I think. It will be better for everything and everyone involved in this study if it is. However, I'm reminded of Samuel's telling a boastful king, "Let not him who puts the armor on, boast like him who takes the armor off."

In his first negative, Lynn asks me, "Well Samuel, you do understand that if those Methodist, Episcopal, Baptist, etc., churches decide to become autonomous and suspend financial assistance to outside human institutions due to the proliferation of lawsuits against religious institutions today that they will no longer be considered Denominations according to your definition."

Now here's a practical question, as we all know, denominations are disbanding at the rate of several a week, aren't they?

No, they are being formed at an ever-increasing rate. But in the event that congregations of Methodists become autonomous and are involved in no collective action, they will no longer constitute a denomination. They still will not have obeyed the gospel of Christ, and probably still hold to a lot of false doctrine, but they will not be a denomination.

Lynn then asks me if I believe that “the body” anywhere in I Cor. 12 refers to a local church. The answer is no, not in I Cor. 12, nor anywhere else in the New Testament. This is the very mistake some of our brethren make with three false positions on the Lord’s Supper. They have a denominational view of the body of Christ. I’ll discuss this somewhat more in detail in my last affirmative.

Lynn objects that the definition I’m setting forth for a denomination can’t be right because Paul was supported by congregations that were acting collectively or denominationally. Did you notice the evidence he used to prove this? Institutional (more correctly, denominational) brethren use such an argument to sustain the sponsoring church.

Here’s what Lynn said: “I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia (Timothy & Silas) supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.” (2Cor.11:8-9) From this passage we see that many congregations were acting collectively or Denominationally.”

Lynn, perhaps you should check the security settings on your computer. Perhaps a malicious person has hacked into your computer and is sending these assertions out over your name. If so, you should put a stop to it. As a matter of fact, if you’re making these assertions yourself, you should put a stop to it, too. You didn’t make the argument; you just asserted these congregations were acting collectively. If you go ahead and make the argument,

I'll answer it, but I shouldn't be expected to both make the argument and answer it, should I?

There is no example of cooperation in the New Testament where local churches cooperated collectively. In the cooperation that supported Paul, there was no organization larger than a local church. There was no centralized oversight. When congregations function collectively, there is collective oversight and work.

By the way, Lynn, do you really mean to say that they were functioning denominationally? That's what you said. Do you really believe that Paul was supported by denominational action? I don't believe it for a minute. I wonder if any of our readers will.

**Answers to Lynn's Questions:**

1. If the Methodist and Episcopal churches become autonomous and suspend all collective financial support, do you believe that they would no longer be Denominations? Yes or No

If they had no collective action, they would no longer constitute denominations. They wouldn't be Christians until they obey the gospel. Of course, if they were still called Methodists, people would still think they were a denomination, including Lynn and Webster. I have no idea what the preachers, papers, colleges, and preacher training school think on this, nor do I care in the least.

2. Are individuals everywhere who have been baptized according to the scriptures, part of every isolated local congregation, though not members? Yes or No?

No person baptized according to the scriptures is a part of any congregation until he "joins himself" to a local church. One is baptized into the universal church, the one body, not into any local church. I don't know how anyone could be part of every local congregation.

3. Would an individual who has been baptized according to the scriptures have to be a member of an isolated local congregation before he/she could be a part? Yes or No?

Lynn, I don't understand. Be a part of what? If you mean the universal church (which is not even mentioned in your question), he was baptized into the universal church, since he was baptized into the one body. He doesn't have to be a member of a local church to be a part of the universal church. If I'm not guessing what your poorly phrased question means, take another run at it and I'll try it again.

4. Do to the vast numbers of people who became Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:21,24,26,) do you believe that those congregations became Denominations when they acted collectively by sending money to the congregation/s in Jerusalem who were suffering from a great famine? (Acts 11:27-30)

I don't believe for a moment that those congregations, or any others in the New Testament, acted collectively under any circumstances. My institutional (more accurately, denominational) brethren argue this way, but I usually let them make their argument before I answer it. Had these churches acted collectively, I would freely admit they acted denominationally. If you believe these churches acted collectively, it's an example of your denominational thinking. If you've ever put it into practice, it's an example of denominational action you've been involved in.

5. Do you believe that all the congregations that acted collectively in aiding Paul, Timothy, and Silas, became Denominations in so doing? Yes or No

Again, I don't believe there is an example in the New Testament of churches acting collectively, so none of them were involved in denominational action, and none became denominations. You've not even attempted to prove collective action of churches in the New Testament. You've just asserted it.



So, your negative consists of a number of questions, which I've answered, and quite a number of assertions of collective action of churches in the New Testament, with nary a proof.

I now turn to my second affirmative.

## **II. History of the Denominational Concept**

In view of such widespread lack of understanding concerning the origin and rise of the denominational concept, we now want to notice its origin. It is intimate with the rise of Roman Catholicism.

Several times, Lynn has expressed an interest of how the churches of the restoration movement in America fit with the definition of a denomination. This will become absolutely evident in this affirmative.

### **A. Local Churches**

In the New Testament, Christians joined themselves to local congregations that were self-ruling and independent (Ac. 9.26). They were overseen by elders, bishops (overseers), or shepherds whose authority was limited to that local church (Ac. 14.23, I Pet. 5.1-2). No concept existed of allegiance to another congregation, a collection of congregations, or a denomination.

### **B. Metropolitans**

As the simplicity of organization of New Testament Christians deteriorated, local leaders began to exercise authority over other local congregations: George Park Fisher wrote:

“After we cross the limit of the first century we find that with each board of elders there is a person to whom the name ‘bishop’ is especially applied.” (George Park Fisher, *History of the Christian Church* [New York:

Charles Scribner's Sons, 1827], p. 51.) Later, Fisher says, "The bishop of the chief city of each province was called the metropolitan. (Ibid., p. 104.)

### C. Regional Church Councils

Mosheim, in his *Ecclesiastical History* also points out the "Bishops" of churches in various provinces began meeting to deliberate on doctrinal issues and to coordinate provincial activities among the churches. He said:

"These councils--of which no vestige appears before the middle of this (2nd) century--changed nearly the whole form of the church." (John Lawrence Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, I [Rosemead, CA: Old Paths Book Club, 1959], pp. 116-117.)

By the end of the fourth century, metropolitans of Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria had assumed oversight of churches in several provinces. The concept of collective action of churches was now in place--a coalition of churches that constitutes a denomination. As Mosheim correctly says, the whole form of the church had been changed. This change was critical to the concept of a denomination, although modern denominations did not arise for at least another twelve hundred years!

### D. Universal Church Councils

The first "universal" (Ecumenical) Council was held at the order of the Roman Emperor Constantine in Nicea in 325 AD. This Council of Nicea produced the Nicene Creed. Mark it well, the Apostles of Christ and first century Christians never attended a conference of congregations, nor ever laid eyes on such a creed.

By the fourth century, the metropolitans of the four leading cities of the Roman Empire, Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria competed for oversight of the universal collection of congregations. At the end of the sixth century, Gregory the Great,

Bishop of Rome, denounced John the Faster (Patriarch of Constantinople) for his assumed title of “Universal Patriarch.” In 606 AD, Boniface III was proclaimed “Universal Bishop” over all the churches.

In only five centuries, the transition from the simple organization of the autonomous local church to the universal coalition of local churches now seen in Roman Catholicism was completed. Rather than the body of Christ consisting of Christians, the concept now was the body of Christ consisting of churches, which themselves consisted of Christians. This is the essence of denominationalism

### **E. The European Reformation Movement**

In the reformation movement of the sixteenth century and beyond, this denominational concept was carried over into Protestantism. Leaders like Luther, Wesley, and Calvin, while they courageously fought many of the excesses of Roman Catholicism, unfortunately retained many other doctrines and concepts of Catholicism. While they rejected the Pope as the visible head of a universal collection of congregations, they kept the concept of the universal church composed of congregations. Thus, the denominations that resulted from the work of these men and their followers simply added more collections of churches!

### **F. The American Restoration Movement**

In the early and mid-nineteenth century, this same denominational concept was carried over into the restoration movement in America. While the restorationists of this period did a tremendous amount of work to persuade people to renounce their denominational creeds and use the Bible as their only standard, their concept of the body of Christ was still that of a church of churches, not a church of Christians. Such a concept was bound to produce still more collections of churches!

### 1. Alexander Campbell

Alexander Campbell, a leader in the restoration movement in America, apparently held this view of the body of Christ for quite a lengthy period of time. In the *Millennial Harbinger* of July 1834 (p. 315), he writes:

“The church...is not one congregation or assembly, but the congregation of Christ, composed of Christ, composed of all the individual congregations on earth. (Cited by Monroe Hawley, *Redigging the Wells* [Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1976], p. 61.)

Twenty years later, Campbell still held this view, for he says in the *Millennial Harbinger* of June 1853 (p. 303):

“Every individual church on earth stands to the whole church of Christ as one individual man to one particular church. (*Ibid.*)

Such views aren't surprising. As we noted earlier, the only churches Campbell knew were churches composed of churches, i.e., denominations.

### 2. Robert Milligan

Another extremely influential leader in the American Restoration Movement, Robert Milligan, apparently subscribed to this same concept. He writes:

“...for the sake of order, convenience, and efficiency, this one body may be divided into as many churches or congregations as may be thought necessary; each one of which, when fully organized, should have its own corps of Elders and Deacons. (Robert Milligan, *Scheme of Redemption* [Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1868], p. 509.)

Recall that Lynn wrote: I have NEVER heard or read a clear definition of what a real denomination is in comparison with churches of the Restoration movement. It gets even more interesting when churches whose doctrine is totally different from the Restoration churches, claim to be 'Non-Denominational' doesn't it?

It's not surprising that the leaders of the restoration movement didn't give a clear definition of a denomination. They were involved in denominational thinking up to their eyeballs! Later on, we'll see some restoration leaders, including Campbell and Milligan, also acted denominationally.

#### **G. Missionary Society Controversy Wracks American Restoration Movement**

We ought not be surprised that since men had labored under the denominational concept of the body of Christ for 1600 years, the American restoration movement resulted in still more collections of churches: the Christian Church, the Disciples of Christ, and the churches of Christ. In the beginning, some in these groups had the concept of independent local congregations of Christians, as David Lipscomb, one of the most influential of their leaders, wrote:

“All meetings of churches or officers of churches to combine more power than a single church possesses are wrong...A Christian, one or more, may visit a church with or without an invitation and seek to stir them up to a more faithful discharge of their duties. But for one or more to direct what and how all the churches shall work, or to take charge of their men and money and use it, is to assume the authority God has given to each church. (David Lipscomb, *The Gospel Advocate* [Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Publishing Company, 1890], p. 295.)

Thus, the issue of the Missionary Society (an organization through which local churches could work collectively in evangelism) was fought on the grounds it violated the autonomy of

the local church. Among most adherents to the restoration concept, the “coalition of churches” view still held sway.

## **H. Sponsoring Church Controversy Among Churches of Christ**

To the degree these restorationists conceived of the body of Christ as a coalition of congregations, the united movement in which they were involved became increasingly splintered. Churches of Christ have been specially wracked by controversy concerning “sponsoring churches,” that is a concept by which collective action of churches is realized.

What is a “sponsoring church”? It is a congregation that assumes the oversight and control of other congregations’ activity in the general field of evangelism, edification, or benevolence. The elders of the sponsoring church thus become the official board of a collective action of churches vested with the authority of overseeing, controlling, and prosecuting the work involved.

Such restoration efforts were doomed to undergo denomination-type splits because they labored under a denominational concept of the body of Christ all along. It was the same concept we traced from the first quarter of the second century, and as ever, the concept produced even more coalitions of churches!

Sadly, many of those opposed to the sponsoring church concept were thinking of the Lord’s body as being composed of congregations themselves. The end result was two camps of churches thinking of themselves more denominationally than ever before.

## **I. Gospel Guardian Magazine**

It is particularly ironic that at the very time the sponsoring church issue was being discussed among churches of Christ, the champions fighting against the concept were themselves embracing denominational concepts of the body of Christ. For example,

the Gospel Guardian, a magazine published in Lufkin, Texas with Yater Tant as its editor, was highly instrumental in opposing the Herald of Truth. However, even after Tant had debated E. R. Harper and Roy Cogdill had debated Guy N. Woods on the Herald of Truth, we find the following in the Articles of Incorporation of the Gospel Guardian Foundation, which published the Gospel Guardian:

“ARTICLE TWO. The purpose for which it is formed is to support a religious, charitable and educational undertaking--to promote New Testament Christianity by various means, including the publication of paper and tracts pertaining only to and in support of religion, setting forth the tenets of the Churches of Christ--[emphasis mine--SGD]. Articles of Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation of Gospel Guardian Foundation, p. 1, Filed in Office of Secretary of State of Texas, September 1, 1958, Signed by Roy E. Cogdill, Yater Tant, James W. Adams, Harry Pickup, Jr., Osby Weaver, Fred A. Hutson, and Troy C. Irwin.)

Notice the phrase “tenets of the Churches of Christ.” If the churches of Christ are nondenominational, they should collectively have no tenets to be set forth. What organization larger than a local church is there to set them forth? We know who sets them forth in the Lutheran denomination, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses--the denominational hierarchy. Who does it in the churches of Christ? Generally, preachers, papers, and colleges, the three things we have that are easy to be larger than a local church. THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT LYNN ENDORSED IN HIS SECOND AFFIRMATIVE when he said that “the responsibility of lining up local churches doctrinally is not the work of a local church, but “papers, colleges, and schools of preaching”! It is precisely this type of thinking that enabled these men to adopt such language in their Articles of Incorporation. These brethren said they were debating “institutionalism,” more correctly, denominationalism (collective action of congregations). However, they couldn’t condemn it as denominationalism because they had a denominational view of the body of Christ themselves, and were

setting forth and defending the tenets of that view! Now comes Lynn Graham doing the same thing for the same reason.

It's easy to see how such men, viewing themselves as propagating and defending the tenets of a denominational coalition of churches, can subsequently attempt to control the congregations which follow their concepts, even to the point of marking congregations in other states as unfaithful. In the New Testament, no local church had preachers, religious papers, or religious colleges to exercise that kind of influence in or over its local work.

Robert F. Turner, a clear-thinking preacher of those times said:

“ANY PROJECT OR INSTITUTION OPERATED BY OR FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE CHURCH AT LARGE, “THE BROTHERHOOD,” TENDS TO DENOMINATIONALIZE THAT BROTHERHOOD. [emphasis his--SGD] (Robert F. Turner, “The Schools, and Denominationalism,” *The Preceptor*, XI, No. 8 [Beaumont, TX: The Preceptor Company, June 1962], p. 124.)

For a good illustration of how propagating the tenets of a coalition of churches manifests itself as a denominational split complete with outsiders determining the course of action of local churches on controversial subjects, please see Chapter 13, “Fellowship on Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage,” in the author's *Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage: The Uniform Teaching of Moses, Jesus & Paul*.

Then Turner continues with some sobering advice in such brotherhood (really congregationhood or denomination) organizational situations. He said:

“The institution itself may not be so much to blame as the “brotherhood” conceptions that produce and maintain the institution. Party ties are made and strengthened, opinions accepted by the majority become traditions, are



crystallized into party tenets; and accepted in the second or third generation as proof of orthodoxy. When the “brotherhood” functions, there must be the acceptance of common direction and guidance; the “brotherhood voice” must be heard. And “brotherhood schools” have paved the way for denominational organizations among members of the Lord’s church. No amount of denying can change this obvious historical and current fact. (Robert F. Turner, “The Schools, and Denominationalism,” *The Preceptor*, XI, No. 8 [Beaumont, TX: The Preceptor Company, June 1962], p. 124.)

## **J. Restoring the Restoration Movement**

Among so-called heirs of the American restoration movement, significant calls arise from time to time to re-unite the various segments of the movement. For example, the title of one prominent book with this thrust is Leroy Garrett’s *The Stone-Campbell Movement, An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., 1981). Garrett’s use of “churches” in his title shows he’s not talking about three universal churches, for he certainly doesn’t believe in such. Neither is he concerned with the unity of three local churches. Rather, he concerns himself with the unity of three coalitions of congregations—i.e., three denominational groups in one grand coalition of congregations made up of the coalition of churches of Christ, Christian Churches, and Disciples of Christ congregations. Such a coalition is unknown in the New Testament; the three coalitions that arose from the restoration movement came from the denominational concept of Campbell and others. Should anyone now strive to put those many congregations back into one denominational group?

## **K. The Crossroads/Boston Movement**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a new movement troubling churches of Christ originated from one congregation in Gaines-

ville, Florida. In the late eighties it became dominated by a group known as the Boston Church of Christ.

Many concerns have been expressed regarding the arrangements and teachings of the “Crossroads/Boston Movement.” The real issue is not whether it is scriptural to have one congregation under one eldership in a city. It is not whether a congregation can use a private home as a meeting place for worship. Nor is it whether a congregation can have only one meeting a week on Sunday. Likewise, the real concern is not whether a congregation may meet in separate groups in private homes during the week. The issue is not whether one Christian can ask another for advice about sin in his life, nor whether one Christian can ask for another to pray for him about his problem. The issue is not whether one who is older in the faith can help a new Christian in his spiritual growth, nor whether the strong is to help the weak. Likewise, the issue is not whether a Christian is to teach as many people as possible.

The real issue and concern is that the Crossroads/Boston movement still labors under a denominational view of the body of Christ. The Boston Church is, in a very real sense, the “Mother Church” of a coalition of churches who, in their literature, is composed of “Pillar Churches,” “Capitol City Churches,” “Small City Churches,” and “Countryside Churches.” Kip McKean, evangelist in the Boston Church explains in the Boston Bulletin of January 4, 1987:

“These are churches established in the mega-population centers of the world. These cities, and correspondingly the churches built in them, influence more than the country in which they are located. Their sphere of influence is over several countries. It is upon these “pillar” churches that the world brotherhood will be built. (Kip McKean, Boston Bulletin, January 4, 1987, cited by Barnett, *The Discipling Movement* [Phoenix, AZ: published by Maurice Barnett, 1987], p. 61.)

Once one realizes that a denomination is a collective of churches, he soon comes to the conclusion that the Crossroads/Boston movement isn't building a brotherhood, but a full-fledged denomination.

In the bulletin of the Mission Church in San Diego, California, one of the "Pillar Churches" of the movement, Gordon Ferguson writes concerning the church in the New Testament:

"A study of leader training in Acts underscores some vital issues. 1. All of the congregations were really one Body rather than highly independent segments. 2. Leaders were appointed for the purpose of maturing the Body, and not just members of one congregation. (Gordon Ferguson, *Bulletin of the Mission Church of San Diego, CA*, cited by Maurice Barnett, *Ibid.*, p. 59.)

These quotations establish that these men are not working to build a brotherhood of Christians, but rather a sisterhood of congregations, that is just another denomination. One does not have to be much of a student of the history of similar endeavors, from the second century to the present one, to confidently know this movement too is doomed to produce even more coalitions of churches. This is not because of a lack of sincerity in those involved, but because they labor under a denominational concept of the body of Christ.

Such collective action of congregations is denominational to the core! Thus, those interested in non-denominational congregations will flee all such collective action of congregations. The universal church is not the collection of local churches, but the collection of all Christians in fellowship with God.

## **L. Enforcing Doctrinal Uniformity in Churches of Christ**

Having seen above that the Gospel Guardian, in its founding documents, viewed their work as propagating "the tenets of the

churches of Christ,” a thoroughgoing denominational view, we now come to Lynn’s concept of how doctrinal uniformity should be attained in churches of Christ. Lynn says that the responsibility of lining up local churches doctrinally is not the work of a local church, but “papers, colleges, and schools of preaching.” How is that any different from the view the founders of the Gospel Guardian had? As a matter of fact, how is it any different from what happens in the Southern Baptist Convention or forces within the Episcopal Church, which is now undergoing a purge of congregations that support homosexual priests? Would anyone dare say that Episcopal churches are independent local churches, or that they have congregational autonomy? We wouldn’t dare say that, would we? While we deny that Episcopalian churches are autonomous, can we at the same time say that churches of Christ are independent and autonomous while their doctrinal uniformity is enforced by preachers, papers, and colleges, the things we have in churches of Christ that are larger than a local church? I’m not surprised that Lynn knows how doctrinal uniformity is enforced among many churches of Christ; I’m surprised that he admitted it so freely, and that he actually endorses it! Lynn’s view on this makes the independence of local churches a myth!

I said at the first of this affirmative that “In the New Testament, Christians joined themselves to local congregations that were self-ruling and independent (Ac. 9.26). They were overseen by elders, bishops (overseers), or shepherds whose authority was limited to that local church (Ac. 14.23, I Pet. 5.1-2). No concept existed of allegiance to another congregation, a collection of congregations, or a denomination.”

I doubt that anyone reading this disagreed with that description as they read it. However, if Lynn’s position on doctrinal uniformity in churches of Christ is true (and it is to a great extent), congregations participating are not self-ruling: they don’t determine their own view of doctrine. They’re not independent, but subject to the enforcement of preachers, papers, and colleges. The elders of the congregation don’t have authority over the congregation, but are themselves subject to forces larger than their own

local church. Lynn's view, like the sponsoring church, destroys completely the autonomy of every congregation participating in that view. How is that different from Roman Catholicism and Jehovah's Witnesses, which denounce denominationalism, but are thoroughgoing denominations themselves?

Lynn, I'm not meaning to be condescending. I have great respect for you and for your interest in this subject. I know you're far more sensitive to this issue than the average bird. I appeal to you to study further, see your need to go beyond Webster's simplistic definition of a denomination, consider further the application of a more sophisticated definition of the term to the restoration movement, and later. I'm confident you'll see your way through this, and then help others see it as well.



## Graham's Second Negative

### Proposition Two

Two congregations following the same doctrine and having the same name do not necessarily constitute a denomination.

Affirm: Samuel G. Dawson

Deny: Lynn Graham

I never would have thought that you would include Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, etc., etc., in your proposition!

I asked; If the Methodists and Episcopal churches become autonomous and suspend all collective financial support, do you believe that they would no longer be Denominations? Yes or No? Samuel, you said; "If they had no collective action, they would no longer constitute denominations. They wouldn't be Christians until they obeyed the gospel. Of course, if they were still called Methodists, people would still think they were a denomination, including Lynn and Webster." Just about everyone in the world but you Samuel.

I asked; Would an individual who has been baptized according to the scriptures have to be a member of an isolated local congregation before he/she could be a part? Yes or No? Samuel, you said; "Lynn, I don't understand. Be a part of what? If you mean the universal church (which is not even mentioned in your question) , he was baptized into the universal church, since he was baptized into one body. He doesn't have to be a member of a local church to be part of the universal church." Ok Samuel, then he can belong to a congregation that practices 'collective

action' and still be a part of the church universal. Thus, be in a saved condition.

I asked; Do to the vast numbers of people who became Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:21,24,26) do you believe that those congregations became Denominations when they acted collectively by sending money to the congregation/s in Jerusalem who were suffering from a great famine? Yes or No? Samuel, you said; "I don't believe for a moment that those congregations, or any others in the New Testament, acted collectively under any circumstances."

I asked; Do you believe that all the congregations that acted collectively in aiding Paul, Timothy, and Silas, became Denominations in so doing? (2Cor.11:8-9) Samuel, you said; "Again, I don't believe there is an example in the New Testament of churches acting collectively, so none of them were involved in denominational action, and none became denominations."

I agree that there is no New Testament example of one out of two or more congregations assuming responsibility for a temporary work. When congregations aided individual Christians or other congregations, they just each sent their aid via personal messenger/s. That is the example of New Testament 'collective action' by individual congregations. There is no scriptural authority for a congregations to collectively support a perpetual operation, nor for one of these congregation to assume the responsibility of the others in that perpetual operation.

Samuel, why do you contradict yourself? In your 1st Affirmative under the heading; 'A Religious Denomination Is Not Just Something "Named"' you went to MY source! You quoted a monetary section of Webster's on the word (denomination) as: 'The name of a class of things; a class or kind (especially of units) having a specific name or value.' Thus we speak of currency consisting of several denominations: five-dollar bills, tens, etc. "However, a religious denomination then is more than something named." Remember what you said in that same 1st Affirmative under the heading; 'A Church of Churches Is a Denomination'



in the 10th paragraph....."This is precisely what a denomination is: a plurality of churches acting collectively." Hello Samuel! You have your definition consisting of 2 items....not 1 item, in your 1st Affirmative!

Samuel, there are serious problems with your position. Very serious. Perhaps before engaging in any future debate, you should iron these problems out instead of giving a history lesson.

Problems:

1. You said that those in 'institutional collective action' congregations are a part of the church (universal) thus removing the urgency to disband that kind of work.

2. You said that the only thing that made Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, etc., etc., churches 'Denominations' was their 'institutional collective action' and if discontinued, they all would no longer be Denominations.

3. You refer to an obscure source to back your definition of denomination; Donald G. Tinder

4. You refer to MY source and give the right word but wrong subject with it's definition. (Webster's)

5. You have a serious problem with perception of definitions.

Samuel says; "This is precisely what a denomination is: a plurality of churches acting collectely."

Samuel says; "I appeal to you to study further, see your need to go beyond Webster's simplistic definition of a denomination,..."

Webster's says; Denomination: [3] NAME, DESIGNATION, a general name for a catagory. [4] a religious organization uniting local congregations in a single, legal and administrative body.

Webster's says; Denominationalism: [1] devotion to denominational principles or interests. [2] the emphasizing of denominational interests to the point of being narrowly exclusive SECTARIANISM.

Samuel, you are maintaining that a 'method' of #4(Denomination) of Webster's is a denomination applicable to the churches of Christ that use the 'sponsoring' congregational system. Webster's says 'organization' not 'method' is denominational.

So far:

Your proposition could only stand if these two congregations were the only two congregations in existence according to Webster's. Because there exists today; names, doctrines, and practices, that cause congregations to be 'narrowly exclusive' of each other.

Two congregations following the same doctrine and having the same name do not necessarily constitute a denomination.

Affirm: Samuel G. Dawson

Deny: Lynn Graham

## Dawson's Third Affirmative

Proposition: Two congregations following the same doctrine and having the same name do not necessarily constitute a denomination.

Affirm: Samuel G. Dawson

Deny: Lynn Graham

Before I give my final affirmative in this debate, there are several things I need to notice in Lynn's second negative.

Lynn bemoans the fact that I think that if churches constituting a denomination disbands (his hyper-realistic example—denominations disband all the time, don't you know), that the churches would no longer constitute a denomination, saying everyone in the world would disagree with me. Like I said in the beginning, very few people understand what a denomination is, Lynn. People in denominations don't worry about the definition, and most Christians oversimplify it. That's why I was anxious to take you up on your challenge. After all, you yourself said you hadn't seen a clear definition until less than two months ago. Most Christians are going to be willing to go beyond Webster's definition of religious concepts such as denomination, salvation, Easter, baptism, etc.

Concerning my statement that scriptural baptism puts one into the universal church, but not a local church, Lynn says, "Ok Samuel, then he can belong to a congregation that practices 'collective action' and still be a part of the church universal. Thus, be in a saved condition."

Of course, Lynn. I don't see any issue about what constitutes a denomination here. If he's scripturally baptized and joins himself (as Paul did in Jerusalem) to a local church, he's still a part of the church universal and in a saved condition. If you thought I thought otherwise, you were mistaken.

You then quote my answers to your questions with no comment. I've advised you before that there's no point in padding your installments by quoting your questions and my answers if you aren't going to make any comment. Those questions and answers are already part of the record.

Concerning congregational cooperation, Lynn says, "When congregations aided individual Christians or other congregations, they just each sent their aid via personal messengers. That is the example of New Testament 'collective action' by individual congregations."

Lynn, I'm not sure you're clear on your concept of collective action. When one congregation sent funds to Paul through its own messenger, the Christians in that congregation are acting collectively, but there was no collective action of congregations. This, of course, is not denominational action since there was no collective action of congregations. However, you said (referring to II Cor. 11.8), "From this passage we see that many congregations were acting collectively or Denominationally." There is a big difference between a congregation composed of Christians acting collectively, and a number of congregations acting collectively. One isn't denominational action, the other is, and you asserted, "congregations were acting collectively or denominationally,"  
**IN YOUR OWN WORDS.**

Having covered the parts of Lynn's negative that needed clarifying, I now conclude with my last affirmative.

### **III. Acting vs. thinking denominationally**

In my last affirmative, I want to address the difference between thinking and acting denominationally. There have been and are many who have thought denominationally, yet never put those thoughts into practice. On the other hand, there have been and are many others who have not only thought of the Lord's church in denominational church, and have gone ahead to put those thoughts into practice.

Having determined what a denomination is, and see how the concept developed historically, we can see definite examples of denominational thinking.

#### **A. Thinking Denominationally**

##### **1. Campbell/Milligan**

We have seen where both Alexander Campbell and Robert Milligan, with their view of the universal church being composed of all the local churches, were definitely thinking in purely denominational terms. However, this didn't mean that they were acting denominationally. However, by the time they were involved in the Missionary Society, they were putting collective action of congregations into practice, and they were definitely acting denominationally.

##### **2. Gospel Guardian Magazine**

In the founding document of the Gospel Guardian, when they spoke of the tenets of the churches of Christ, they were thinking and speaking denominationally. The danger of so thinking is that it so often leads to denominational action.

##### **3. "What does the church of Christ teach?"**

Once in a while, someone asks, "The Lutheran Church teaches such-and-such; what does the church of Christ teach?" The

universal church doesn't teach anything collectively. Since the time of the apostles, it has had no spokesman to tell what the universal church teaches. On the other hand, no one asking this question really cares what the position of a local church is on a specific point. Most often, this question comes from a person who thinks of the body of Christ as a coalition of churches, just like the denomination he may belong to. Again, we don't want to perpetuate the denominational concept.

How would Lynn answer this question? Would he say, the church of Christ teaches what the preachers, papers, colleges, and preacher training schools says are the tenets of the churches of Christ? It seems to me that's exactly what he asserts.

#### **4. Church of Christ as an Adjective**

Just about every time the term church of Christ is used as an adjective, it's used in a denominational sense. If one is said to be a "church of Christ preacher," no one really believes he preaches as an agent of the universal church, for the universal church has no living spokesman. No one seems to care if he speaks only for a local church. Most likely, the thought is that he preaches for a coalition of congregations, a thoroughgoing denominational concept.

Years ago, in an announcement concerning a debate between a preacher in a Sabbatarian denomination and myself, it was said he represented the Seventh-day Church of God, and I represented the Church of Christ. Although neither of us represented the universal church, he represented a denominational coalition of congregations. Sad to say, the language of the announcement said I did, too! Even worse, the concept in my mind was denominational as well, as I didn't consider myself as representing just a local congregation of Christians.

The same thing could be said of "church of Christ" songbooks, colleges, etc. Those aren't imagined as belonging to just a local church, and no one believes they belong to the universal church,

including both living and dead saints. They are generally thought of as belonging to a coalition of congregations.

These remarks are not given to be picky. We need to appreciate the fact that a great number of people are looking for just simple nondenominational service of God. They may not realize that many others try to be just Christians without the denominational teachings, organization, allegiance, creeds, etc. Let's not hide a nondenominational approach from them with denominational concepts and language. As the maiden told Peter as he stood warming his hands by the fire, "The way you talk gives you away" (Mt. 26.73).

Listen to the following words, that use the name church of Christ in definitely an unscriptural, denominational sense:

"My childhood was of the strict and straight Church of Christ variety. As a teenager, I was the moral and doctrinal example of Church of Christ orthodoxy. I memorized all the scriptures that are important to the Church of Christ. I mesmerized myself with the Church of Christ doctrines and vigorously defended the Lord's church! I was proud of my religion. I was conscientious and zealous. I chose to go to a Church of Christ college because of my affection for the Church of Christ doctrines." (Wayne Willis, "The Plight of the Church of Christ Liberal," *Mission*, June 1973, pp. 9, 10.)

Reflection on this person's use of "church of Christ," reveals he doesn't use it of the universal church that scripturally has no college, no collectively set forth doctrines, etc. Nor does he speak of a local church. Rather, he uses the term in a denominational sense, in other words, the doctrines and colleges of a collective of congregations. Thus, we hear of "church of Christ preachers," "church of Christ songbooks," etc. All similar uses of the term neither speak of the universal church that belongs to Christ nor of a local church, but of an alignment of local churches acting collectively, i.e., a denomination. This is not to say these folks

consider themselves a denomination, or that they are; but they certainly use the term denominationally.

7. A very interesting example of thinking denominationally concerns three aspects of the Lord's Supper. Some brethren believe there is one loaf for an entire congregation, one container for the fruit of the vine for an entire congregation, and one communion with no second offering for an entire congregation. They earnestly base those beliefs on the fact that the scriptures teach that there is one cup for the one body, one loaf for the one body, and one communion for the one body.

However, these brethren are viewing each local church as a body of Christ, or the local body. If this contention is true, then the universal body of Christ would be composed of all the local bodies. There are at least two things wrong with this concept: 1) The body of bodies concept is purely denominational, and 2) there is but one body, not many. Christ has as many bodies as he has brides, and just as he doesn't have a bride (or perhaps several) in every city, he doesn't have a body in every city. There is one body, and it is the universal church, not a local one. When someone speaks of a local church as a body or a "local body," he's entertaining a denominational view of the body of Christ. Realizing this, we can see that the one body, the universal church, never did, doesn't now, and never will use one container, one loaf, or one communion in one assembly. This drives us to the conclusion that the cup is not the container but the fruit of the vine. The one loaf is not the physical loaf, but the unleavened bread itself. Likewise, the one communion isn't now, never was, and never will be in one assembly.

## **B. Acting Denominationally**

### **1. Denominations opposing denominationalism**

We know that no one claims to oppose denominationalism more than Roman Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses, but their coalitions of local churches give them away: the Watchtower



Society, with its Regions, Districts, Branches, and Zones, as well as the International Churches of Christ, with its World Sectors, Geographic Sectors, etc., as they say, to "establish a global network of control over every last congregation."

## **2.. Missionary Society**

As we've seen, the Missionary Society, based upon collective action of congregations, was denominational action from the beginning.

## **3. The Sponsoring Church**

Again, the sponsoring church, because brethren had been thinking denominationally, was collective action of congregations, and was denominational action from the beginning.

## **4. Crossroads/Boston/International Churches of Christ Movement**

Again, this collective of congregations with its church of churches view, functions in a purely denominational fashion. These men are not working to build a brotherhood of Christians, but rather a sisterhood of congregations, that is, just another denomination.

## **5. Enforcing Doctrinal Uniformity in Churches of Christ**

Lynn's concept, which is certainly not his alone, that preachers, papers, colleges, preacher training schools, etc., are responsible for doctrinal uniformity is based upon purely denominational thinking. To the extent they're enforcing and participating in the enforcement of such, they are acting in an entirely denominational fashion. If this is correct, what is the use of "Bible Study" in local churches? All we would need would be sessions where Christians would assemble and rehearse the creed the preachers, papers, colleges, and preacher training schools hand down to us. Wait a minute! That's what happens in many local churches, isn't it? Why even have debates on religiousde-

bates.com or debates at all, if doctrinal uniformity is achieved by what the “elites” hand down to the commoners?

### **C. Application to Lynn’s Proposition**

With these examples of thinking vs. acting denominationally, we merely remark that Lynn’s definition has congregations that are neither acting nor even thinking denominationally constituting a denomination. His definition affirms that congregations that don’t even exist at the same time (but centuries apart), who are not even aware of each other’s existence, who never contact each other, who have no central organization of oversight, and who have no joint collective action are denominations merely because they have the same name and doctrine. These congregations don’t even think or act denominationally, yet Lynn and Webster pronounce them a denomination. This is why their definition is simplistic.

### **Conclusion:**

In my conclusion, I wish to list just a few of the astounding statements Lynn has made in support of his concept of a denomination:

1. I asked Lynn if it was a work of a local church to even try to line up with other churches doctrinally, and if so, where was the passage that taught such? Lynn said, “Samuel, no, that is not ‘part of the work’ of the local church. That is ‘part of the work’ of church papers, Colleges and congregations that host brotherhood lectureships, congregations that host Gospel Meetings, and Schools of Preaching.”

2. Two months ago, Lynn wrote me after I had accepted his challenge, “I have NEVER heard or read a clear definition of what a real Denomination is in comparison with churches of the Restoration movement.” This was evidently before he even read

Webster, yet two months later he now says Webster's definition is the only point of reference.

3. Lynn asserts that Webster is a correct point of reference "because Christian Denominations did not exist in the New Testament as they do now." "Christian" denominations?

4. Lynn's proposition affirms that there is a single specific name for the Lord's church, but then he also says he agrees that there is no exclusive proper name for the Lord's church.

5. Lynn asserts sponsoring church arguments to sustain collective action of churches in the New Testament, and asserts that congregations supporting Paul were doing so "collectively or denominationally."

My reading of the New Testament tells me that a local church is an independent workgroup of disciples. However, there are problems with this definition. First, churches of Christ are, for the most part, not composed of disciples or students. If we say that some person is a student of mathematics or history, we expect that he has some books on the subject, carries them around, reads them, studies them, has a real interest in the subject, and is accustomed to talking about the subject. If we ran into one claiming to be such a student and he had no books, didn't read on the subject, knew hardly anything about the subject, we would have serious doubts as to whether he was such a student.

So it is with most Christians. In churches of Christ, one can be a member for 40 years, not know the books of the Bible, why each book is in the Bible, or even read all the books in the Bible. If one cannot even name the books, how could he possibly know what is in them? How can he possibly become a teacher of them, yet Christians are obligated to become such.

I'm not saying most are not good people, in the sense that they're enjoyable to be around, would give you the shirt off their back, trustworthy, etc. But they're not students; they're not even expected to be disciples.

Second, most churches of Christ are not workgroups. Rather, there are a very few workers, perhaps the preacher, perhaps one of the elders, and a couple of other freaks (I use that term honorably--they're the exception to the rule) who are playing their hearts out on the field, while the rest are sitting in the stands watching the game. They are a church of spectators, not of working students.

Third, most churches of Christ are not independent, but highly subject to brotherhood pressure from the three things they've got that are larger than a local congregation: preachers, papers, and colleges.

Now, I'm not going to charge anyone for this little rant, and I know there are a few notable exceptions to this pattern, both as far as individual Christians and churches are concerned. I think most readers will agree with the general truth of what I'm saying.

One reason I'm indignant about Lynn's endorsing denominationalism in churches of Christ is the effect on brethren who follow his path of watching out for the traveling brethren and depending on preachers, papers, and colleges to attain their doctrinal uniformity with other congregations. Thus, we have Christians who are not fulfilling their duties as disciples while squandering their energy on essentially denominational responsibilities that Lynn and others can't find in the Bible to save their lives.

I appreciate Lynn's efforts in this exchange, and hope to meet him someday. He's conducted himself well. I hope my efforts have been of use to him. When I agreed to this debate, I was confident I would learn more about what constitutes a denomination, and Lynn has helped me do that. Thanks also for the efforts of those who provide and sustain this forum. I hope that our efforts have been of similar usefulness to the reader.

## Graham's Third Negative

Proposition Two:

'Two congregations following the same doctrine and having the same name do not necessarily constitute a denomination.'

Affirm: Samuel G. Dawson

Deny: Lynn Graham

Samuel, you have been very much a gentleman throughout this discussion. Thank you so much. I also wish to thank you for speedy responses. The Restoration material you presented in this discussion is very interesting and informative.

Samuel said; "People in denominations don't worry about the definition, and most Christians oversimplify it." Well, why don't they worry about it? I said; "Ok Samuel, then he can belong to a congregation that practices (institutional) 'collective action' and still be a part of the church universal. Thus, be in a saved condition." Samuel said in reply; "Of course Lynn. I don't see any issue about what constitutes a denomination here. If he's scripturally baptized and joins himself (as Paul did in Jerusalem) to a local church, he's still a part of the church universal and in a saved condition. If you thought I thought otherwise, you were mistaken." Well, is there any wonder why these (institutional) 'collective action' congregations are carrying on 'business as usual' then? If they believe (like Samuel does about them) that their salvation is not affected by this practice, and it is convenient for them.....why stop it? Of course an entire congregation's salvation can be lost by it's practice of something not scriptural! (Rev.2:5, 3:16)

Samuel said; "Most Christians are going to be willing to go beyond Webster's definition of religious concepts such as denomination, salvation, Easter, baptism, etc." Yes Samuel, most CHRISTIANS will. However, most NON-CHRISTIANS won't.

What was the 'collective action' practiced by the congregations in the New Testament that sent aid to Jerusalem and Judea during the great famine (Acts 11:27-30), and the congregations that sent aid to Paul from Macedonia (2Cor:8:1-2), (2Cor.11:8-9)? Not the kind of practice that Samuel has been contending against. Where one of a plurality of congregations assumes responsibility and is known as a 'sponsoring' church. All we know about the situations in which the churches sent aid to individuals or to other congregations, is that just each congregation sent aid. Nothing describing (institutional) 'collective action' situations are described. Paul wrote about the churches that sent aid and Luke writes that churches sent aid. It is recorded that they referred to 'congregations' not to certain individuals who attended services at those places named by Luke and Paul.

In the last Affirmative you pretty much abandoned your defence of your proposition in favor of introducing recognized men of the Restoration Movement and how they thought of congregations as individuals. Much of that last Affirmative was used up in talking about them and their practice. Now, in your last Affirmative, which was: 'Two congregations following the same doctrine and having the same name do not necessarily constitute a denomination' there is no affirming going on what so ever! Samuel, you just used your 3 Affirmatives to attack a section of congregations of the C/churches of Christ that use a the (institutional) 'collective' action method. Those Restoration leaders achieved a great deal of good for the some what limited scriptural perception of the local church they had at the time:

"Christian: 1 a: one who professes belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ. b (1): DISCIPLE (2): a member of one

of the Churches of Christ separating from the Disciples of Christ in 1906. (3): a member of the Christian denomination having part in the union of the United Church of Christ concluded in 1961" Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 10th ed.

Evidently, enough work was done to get enough word out that in order to be just a Christian, even Webster's became aware that the church of the Restoration Movement was the 1st place to go.

Strangely, Samuel believes the cup & loaf congregations are in error for worshipping in a congregational capacity. We do and should worship and function in a congregational capacity. If we didn't, we would end up thinking we could do as much in a congregational capacity as we could as (universal) capacity. Every congregation would be advertizing for a 'Pulpit Minister' or Evangelist. There is no 'office' in the local congregation for such a position in the New Testament. The 'evangelist' is a (universal) office. They were known as 'missionaries' in the New Testament. The only reason they worked at all in any New Testament congregations was because people depended on their spiritual gifts. Today, everyone has access to a New Testament so there is no need for an Evangelist in the local church. Just a note on the one cup issue.....I will admit this....the logic is inescapable that the container is named to suggest it's contents, even if one uses individual communion cups in an assembly. (Lk.22:20) (1Cor.11:) "This cup is the New Testament in (made effective by) My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink (it) 'out of it' in remembrance of me." So BOTH elements are essential...cup & fruit of the vine.

I am not going to try to affirm this proposition for Samuel. I am going to conclude this discussion with the only logical way out of BOTH propositions. That is to continue to fight against Denominationalism by fighting for scriptural adherence. With determination and basic hermeneutics it is very possible to make much headway against Denominationism. We already con-

vinced the Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 10th ed. that we have the way to be just a Christian!

Thank you Samuel and everyone,

Lynn Graham