

What is the Church?

Part 2

A Denominated People



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A couple of years ago I was reading through a book called Providential Deliverances. It was a compilation of short stories about miracles that different people had experienced in their lives. The book was made back in the 1930s I believe, so it's almost 100 years old. Most of the stories were of Seventh-day Adventists, though some were even older stories.

One story though, sticks out in my mind, and I think it goes along perfectly with our subject today. It was about a man in Burma, if I remember correctly he was a Buddhist.



Painting of Burma in the 1800s

He had heard about the Christian Missionaries coming into his country, the two groups he knew by name were the Baptists and Catholics. One of his questions was, if Christianity was true, which of these two groups were God's true people?

One night he had a dream, in the dream two men dressed in white came to his house. He knew they were Christian Missionaries, and he knew this dream was telling him that he needed to accept the Christian faith. But which form of Christianity was right? In the dream there was an angel standing there, and so he asked, which denomination was God's true people, Catholic or Baptist? The angel responded, the true church will tell you about the prophecies.



[illegible]



When asked the question, the angel did not say which denomination, which church, had the truth, he did not say the Baptists, the Catholics, or even the Seventh-day Adventists, he said those that were sharing the prophecies. What identifies us as God's church is not our name, but our fruits, "...by their fruits ye shall know them."

Matthew 7:20

Last time we discussed the question, what is the Church and what makes us God's people? We saw that the church is not a specific denomination, with a specific name, it is an invisible building, a spiritual temple, with Christ as the foundation, and all those who love Jesus and are living up to all the light they have as the living stones that build the walls of the church. We saw that Christ is not for a specific denomination, instead the question is, is a specific denomination for Christ? A denomination or any other organization, is only part of Christ's church as long as they are connected to Christ, but they of themselves are not Christ's church, they are only part of the one true invisible church.



Ellen White Says:

“God has a church. It is not the great cathedral, neither is it the national establishment, neither is it the various denominations; it is the people who love God and keep His commandments. ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matt. 18:20). Where Christ is even among the humble few, this is Christ’s church, for the presence of the High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity can alone constitute a church.” **Upward Look, page 315.**

But if God's church is spiritual and invisible, if it is made up of all those who love Jesus and are living up to all the light they have? What about Present truth, what about the remnant church? Are God's people non-denominational? What does this mean for us?



“As I was considering this matter in the night season (about some saying they were non-denominational), it seemed as if One stood up in the midst of us and pointed us back to the Israelites as an illustration of a distinct people, denominated of God. That which made them denominational was the observance of God's commandments. In the twelfth to the eighteenth verses of the thirty-first chapter of Exodus their distinguishing sign is mentioned. ‘Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep,’ the Lord declared, ‘for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.’” **Manuscript Releases, Vol. 19, p 38-39.**



“...we are strictly denominational; we are sacredly denominated by God and are under His theocracy.” Testimonies, vol 7, p 109.

“God's word to His people is: ‘Come out from among them, and be ye separate, . . . and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters.’ ‘Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.’ 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18; 1 Peter 2:9.



“God's people are to be distinguished as a people who serve Him fully, wholeheartedly, taking no honor to themselves, and remembering that by a most solemn covenant they have bound themselves to serve the Lord and Him only.

“Exodus 31:12-17 quoted (about keeping the Sabbath).

“Do not these words point us out as God's denominated people? and do they not declare to us that so long as time shall last, we are to cherish the sacred, denominational distinction placed upon us? The children of Israel were to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations ‘for a perpetual covenant.’ The Sabbath has lost none of its meaning. It is still the sign between God and His people, and it will be so forever.” **Testimonies, Vol. 9, page 17-18.**

Since we know, that the church is spiritual and invisible, what then does it mean that God has a denominated people, and that we are a part of it? This is our subject today. What does it mean to be a denominated people, in God's eyes, and how are we to be a part of God's denominated People.

Ellen White clearly says that God's people are a denominated people, that we are are denominational. But what does that mean? Does it mean being part of what the world calls a denomination? Just as with the term church, God's definition of denominated is larger and broader then the world's definition. Ellen White says more about the word denominated:



“Observing the Sabbath day is doing the very thing that came from God after He had created the world in six days, and rested upon the seventh day, and sanctified the day of His rest. He did not take any other day for that sanctification of the day of His rest. It denominates those who observe the Sabbath as the people of God.” **Manuscript 139, 1906.**

“One stood up in the midst of us and pointed us back to the Israelites as an illustration of a distinct people, denominated of God. That which made them denominational was the observance of God's commandments.” **Manuscript Releases, Vol. 19, page 38.**



“The children of Israel were instructed to bring their children into their homes, that the plagues might not fall upon them. Their doorposts must be marked with blood, as a witness that they were the denominated people of God. Those whose houses were thus marked were not visited by the destroying angel.” **Letter 47, 1905.**

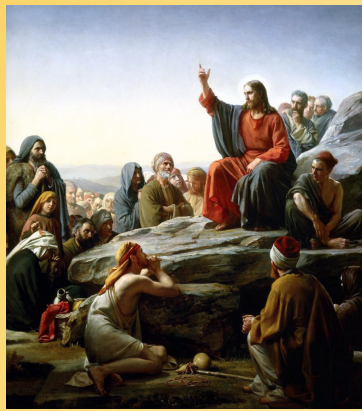
Ellen White points to the children of Israel as an example of a denominated people, they were not denominated by their name, or their birth, they were denominated by the keeping of the commandments of God and keeping themselves unspotted by the world. It was the truth that denominated them, not their name or birth.

By putting the blood on the doorposts, by keeping God's commandments, by keeping the Sabbath given by God as Creation as the seal of his true people, they were denominated, and so are we.

God has always had a denominated people in the world, God's invisible church as always been dominated by the truth they believed and taught, whether or not they were part of a denomination with a specific name. What denominates God's people is present truth.



“In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation. The old truths are all essential; new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it. It is only as the old truths are understood that we can comprehend the new. When Christ desired to open to His disciples the truth of His resurrection, He began ‘at Moses and all the prophets’ and ‘expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself.’ Luke 24:27. But it is the light which shines in the fresh unfolding of truth that glorifies the old. He who rejects or neglects the new does not really possess the old. For him it loses its vital power and becomes but a lifeless form.” **Christ’s Object Lessons, page 127**



“...the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him...” **John 4:23**

What makes us part of God's true invisible church, is the love Jesus and to be living up to all the light we have, for it this light that denominates us. We must worship God not only in Spirit, but in truth. In every age there is present truth, a message from the Bible for that age, that denominates his true people.

The Book of Revelation Denominates God's last church on earth, and the present truth they will teach:

“And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” **Revelation 12:17**

The Bible gives the commandments of God, such as the Sabbath, as one of the truths that denominates God's remnant church. The other one is the testimony of Jesus, which is explained in Revelation 19:10: “...the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

The Spirit of prophecy refers to everything to do with prophecy, it refers to the understanding of the prophecies of the Bible, and also to the restoration of the prophetic gift in the church at the last day.



“Theories will be continually agitated to divert the mind, to unsettle the faith. **Those who have had the actual experience in the unfolding of the prophecies, have been made what they are today, Seventh-day Adventists, by these prophecies.** They are to stand with their loins girt about with truth, and with the whole armor on. . . ‘Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus’ (Rev. 14:12).” **MS 32, 1896**

It is these truths, and the other truths mentioned in Revelation and Daniel, that denominate God's true people today. Those who are teaching the prophecies, who are keeping the Sabbath, and preaching Christ second advent. It was these truths that created the name Seventh-day Adventist.

We are not non-denominational, not because we are part of specific denomination, but because we teach distinctive truths, that denominate us from those that do not teach and believe those things.



“Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.”

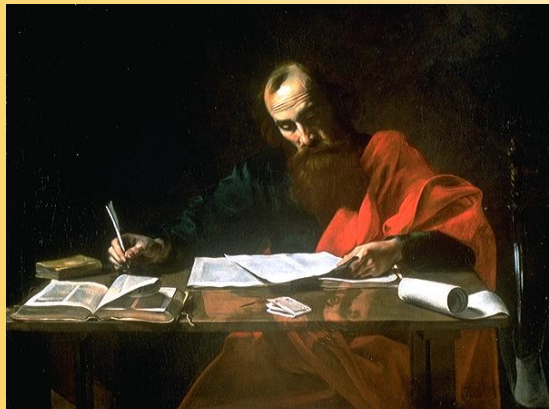
Matthew 21:18-19

This event with the fig tree was a lesson, it was an acted out parable of the Jewish nation. Israel had a name, they had the forms of God's true people, in the world's understanding, they were God's denominated people. They were covered in leaves, and looked like God's people. But they had no fruit, what would make them truly denominated as God's people they lacked. A group can have all the leaves, and can appear to be loyal even to present truth, but if they are for present truth in spirit, then they are covered in leaves. Not a name that we follow Present truth is important, but the actual following of present truth.

It is not the name or an organization that denominates us, but present truth. The question is not about whether we have the name Seventh-day Adventist, the question is, are we Seventh-day Adventists in our hearts. Do we keep the Seventh-day Sabbath and believe in and teach Jesus's second Advent?

Seventh-day Adventists, in the true sense, are not those that are members of the Seventh-day Adventist church, but those that follow present truth for today. Just as the term Israel does not truly apply to the literal Hebrews, but to all those following Christ.

What denominates us today, what makes us true Seventh-day Adventists in heart, is not by being members of the Seventh-day Adventist church, but by believing and teaching those truths that the name teaches. The Seventh-day Sabbath, and the second advent of Christ. It like what Pauls says:



“Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they* all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” **Romans 9:6-8**

Just as being born a literal Israelite did not necessary make you children of Abraham, if in in spirit you did not copy Abraham, being members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not make us Seventh-day Adventists, it is the truth in the heart, that makes us true spiritual Seventh-day Adventists. It's not the name that is important, it's the fruits.

Christ says in Revelation to those who trust to a name or denomination with a specific name to save them:

“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”

Revelation 3:1

A name won't denominate us as God's people, it is the truth, present truth, that denominates us.



“We are to be ready and waiting for the orders of God. Nations will be stirred to their very center. Support will be withdrawn from those who proclaim God’s only standard of righteousness, the only sure test of character. And all who will not bow to the decree of the national councils and obey the national laws to exalt the sabbath instituted by the man of sin, to the disregard of God’s holy day, will feel, not the oppressive power of popery alone, but of the Protestant world, the image of the beast.

“Satan will work his miracles to deceive; he will set up his power as supreme. The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat.” **Selected Message, books 2, page 380.**

“...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18

A denomination with a name can fall and become Babylon, the Seventh-day Adventist church can fall, but present truth can never fall. Present truth will go forward no matter what, Seventh-day Adventism in spirit, denominated by the present truth can go forward, even if the organization with that specific name falls. This why the angel in what he said to the man in Burma, did not say which denomination was correct, he said the one who teaches you present truth. For God's true people will always be those who teach present truth, even if all the churches that used to teach present truth fall, present truth will still denominate God's spiritual church, God's spiritual church will never fall, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.



“Not by its name, but by its fruit, is the value of a tree determined. If the fruit is worthless, the name cannot save the tree from destruction. John declared to the Jews that their standing before God was to be decided by their character and life. Profession was worthless. If their life and character were not in harmony with God’s law, they were not His people.” **Desire of Ages, 107**

But what about organization and unity, what about having a literal name?
Where do these things come in? This will be our subject next time.

To Be Continued...