

Being Inter-Denominational

by George Verwer

Being interdenominational acknowledges history, builds unity, and starts as learners to take the best from different denominations, opening doors for service and fostering loyalty without manipulation.

Duration: 23:27

Scripture: Romans 15:5

Topics: "Denominations"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the reality of human weakness and error, emphasizing that as humans, we are unable to do everything on our own. The sermon also highlights the importance of unity and love within the body of Christ, even in the midst of differences. The speaker acknowledges the positive aspects of interdenominational and parachurch ministries, despite the negative factors associated with them. Additionally, the sermon emphasizes the need to recognize that God can use various methods and streams of truth to reach people, and that it is important to not limit God's work to only one specific approach.

Transcript

I want to speak on the biblical basis of being interdenominational. I think I've only spoke on this once or twice before. I had some very encouraging feedback, and perhaps it's something that I should circulate by cassette tape.

I think we need to understand that one of the reasons that we don't have the recruits that we need, one of ten reasons, is the terrific anti-interdenominational spirit that exists today. Your denominations feel under attack, most of them are, by newer movements. You just follow what's happening in this country.

The growth factor is in the newer movements. Newer movements are often creating their own new denomination. Old denominations feel under attack.

Where does OM come in? For many of them, he is an old American expression, forgive me, not even in the ballpark. We're not even in, on the field. I have a book, I keep meaning to give it to Viv Thomas to review, he's one of my book reviewers, called Church Parachurch, Unhappy or Uneasy Romance.

I haven't given it to you yet, have I? Have you read it already? No. But I know he'll be interested in that book. And I think it's incredibly important to deal with this subject because I know that some people

actually leave OM because they just feel it's second best.

Now there's some of us, you know, we'd be even willing to function in the second best if the Holy Spirit is going to be with us, you know. But there are other idealists that would not want to be in that which is second best. I think that's a great mistake in our thinking.

And I think we need to look at the Scriptures, we need to look at history. I don't think God wants us to deny history. And we get some people who take what they feel is the biblical truth and they say no matter what's happened, no matter what the situation is, this is it, I'm not going to move.

I'm glad that John Stott is not like that. And that he is willing to face real issues even when he doesn't have the total answer. Parachurch is a word, I don't know when that word came into full use, certainly not so long ago, which describes organizations that supposedly function alongside the church.

I've never totally accepted that word because I have believed that the people on OM are sent out by the church. If you're thrust out by the church, in a sense you are not alongside the church, you are part of the church's ongoing missionary force. Now my arms can be alongside of my body, and if that's the definition, I'm willing to accept parachurch.

But in fact, my arms are part of my body, reaching out to do whatever I want to do with them. And I think it's important to understand, and we see that in Acts 13, that when a team is sent out by the church, they to some degree have to have their own organization, as small as it may be, especially back in these days, they weren't on the phone in the telex, getting all the orders from headquarters. They were getting the orders from that headquarters, from God.

And we see this as Paul headed in one direction, suddenly he changed and he went in another direction, and then he went in another direction. And I think the book of Acts helps us understand this concept, because there's an emphasis in the book of Acts on teams. And in many ways, the real heart of, and the biblical unit within OM is that team, that team out in Turkey, that team in Sudan.

They are not day by day getting their instructions from here. They are having to seek God's faith. We have some basic goals.

Most of them have come from them. They originally got some of them from us. They are faced with a very unique situation, by the way, Southern Sudan is in desperate need of our prayers at this time.

And they are going forward in the work there. I think when I originally gave this message, I called it the blessing of being interdenominational. We don't speak about this much, because we are quite happy if someone leaves OM and goes back to their own denomination to serve Christ, no problem.

That is part of OM's training program, to see people trained and go back working in their own churches. There are more people working in their own churches as a result of OM than there are people working on OM, you can be sure. Pastors, deacons, elders, all kinds of church leaders.

And I think the fact that we tried from the earliest days not to speak against denominations. That was a very popular thing back when we were being born. And the word non-denominational was used.

And people tried to put the word non-denominational on us in the early days. And I almost fell for it, it sounded really good. But as I studied it, I realized it often was a one-upmanship term.

And that we are not one of these denominations. We are, then you had to define actually what you meant. OM is inter-denominational.

We work with different denominations. It is one of our distinctives. It is our distinctive to work with Baptists from the southern part of the United States and Lutherans from the southern part of Germany.

It is quite a leap. Some never make it, some people leave OM because they can't handle working with people whose churches believe in infant baptism. Like the Anglicans in England, or Methodists, or many other outstanding groups.

And if you think that is a long leap, try the Salvation Army. You know what they teach on this? I am not sure what they teach, but I know they don't baptize people in their citadels. Not churches, but citadels.

It is interesting after so many years, especially here in Britain, despite the fact that the Salvation Army was condemned in its early days as being totally unscriptural. And having every kind of unscriptural form of practice is still going on as one of the movements that has probably brought more people into the Kingdom of God than any movement in the history of the world. I am not of the Salvation Army, but I have learned so much through just following their history.

If you haven't read that book, *The General Next to God*, you have missed probably one of the most exciting, challenging Christian books of this century. Well, we are always battling time, and I would like to just give you some points for you are all just rushing to make this outline in your notebook. But let me just share some of the positive points for being interdenominational.

We are probably going to be made aware of some of the negatives. Number one, we acknowledge history. To me, that is very important.

Maybe because I was a history student when I first went to college before going to Moody. And I love history. I believe that history is important.

A lot of the Bible is history. The reason some of you find the Old Testament boring, maybe there is no one here in that group, it is history. And for many today, history is boring.

But history, I believe, is important. History tells us three things I have listed here. Number one, God has used so many different groups.

We cannot deny that. You know how people get isolated in their thinking and hyperdenominational in their thinking? They don't get involved with anybody else. This is why OM is so good.

You are forced to get involved with people from other groups. And if you get to know their history and their background, though you may not agree, you may feel they are unscriptural, in your own thinking, you cannot deny that God is mightily using it. So here you are, you are not willing to get involved, but God seems to be very involved.

That causes a few complexities in the thinking of the person who refuses to accept that God works through interdenominational groups or parachurch groups or whatever you want to call them. Number two, God has used so many different methods. You know, even in missionary work today, there are all kinds of fights going on over methodology.

God has chosen to use posters to bring people to Christ, books, mass evangelism, personal evangelism, home Bible studies. God has chosen to use all kinds of groups, groups actually that are far more, far closer to the traditional definition of parachurch than us. We think of gospel radio, the enormous attacks they originally went under when they launched out.

We think of things like gospel recordings, strictly parachurch. And yet, who can deny what God has done through gospel recordings. Number three, God has used some different streams of truth.

Don't be deceived into thinking that today in Britain or anywhere else, it's only one stream where God really has his hand. This is still coming out in some of the preaching and teaching around Britain today. This is really where the action is.

Our group, we're not saying you're not believers, but this is really what God is into today. Be very careful. It's like saying God is with OM, but God is not really so much with YWAM.

God is really moving through Campus Crusade, but inner varsity is really out of it. I actually heard people make generalizations about inner varsity like that some years ago. Because campus became so huge overnight, and inner varsity was moving on at a much slower pace.

God has used all kinds of organizations and Christian streams. And if you study the history and make comparisons between Booth and Wesley, between Darby and Mueller, between Graham and Spurgeon, Dr. Schaeffer, Luther, Whitfield, I guess most of us have been influenced probably by at least 50 to 100 different people. When you're in something interdenominational, you read widely.

It's one of the reasons people find re-entry back to their own church difficult. Because if you become very interdenominational in your thinking, when you get back home, you're going to have to be careful how you express that. Because if you give the idea then that being denominational, or being only in that one church is second best, you're going to miscommunicate.

And I think it's so important to be patient with people who are more local in their situation. They have a terrific loyalty to their own little local church back home. Don't speak out against that.

Don't consider them sort of not educated because they aren't enlightened by the range of people that we meet when we're in something like OM. Don't have geographical pride that the person who's never really traveled is sort of a localized provincial ignoramus. You, the enlightened world traveler coming home.

Most people when you arrive are not wanting you to enlighten them. Most of them may prefer you to just humble yourself a little bit. And I think of course as soon as we move in that direction, people go in the other direction.

They become intimidated and then they destabilize and are not very effective in what they're doing. Number two, this is number two under the main category. The first one we acknowledge history.

Number two, I actually have under it letters ABC. We build unity. God has called us and that includes this ministry here to build unity.

One of the days I'm going to give a message on how God uses the books that you think aren't any good. I always hear when people talk about the STL ministry, we've got some really tremendous books but a lot of them are just mediocre. I'll tell you many, many people have had their life turned around through mediocre

books.

I mean how would George Borla books ever get involved? The right book at the right time can be used of God. And the fact that we have a wide range of Christian books, including books that you probably don't want to read, is part of our culture. A Christian church as big as the Christian church is today should be producing literature on every subject that you can imagine, including things you're not interested in.

And I believe that God through our literature ministry, through our preaching and teaching and tapes, through our own lives, wants to build unity between different groups and different denominations. And we have seen this never to the point that we would like. A, under this section, not just with a few but with all believers.

B, the kind of unity that speaks to unbelievers, because I'll tell you the denominationalism and the divisions in the body really turn off many, many non-Christians. And C, training for men in and for all different churches. So that people can come on a limb and still go back to their own church.

Number three, we start as learners and then we build. We must have a set idea. We may have a set idea, but we remain open.

B, we keep from dead orthodoxy and being too rigid. And C, we can't take the best. We can take the best from different denominations.

You know, we have so much to learn from one another. And that includes the new movements in this country. It's interesting that the editor now of Restoration Magazine is a young man who worked as one of my gophers in Nepal back in 1969.

Roger Day, preached at his wedding. Now the editor of Restoration Magazine, of one of the fastest growing church movements in this country, that again and again has been misunderstood and criticized. I wrote to him yesterday.

We can learn from the old, we can learn from the new. Is it possible for the Salvation Army to work together and have unity with a modern contemporary restoration church? Is it possible for the Salvation Army? Well, some people will say, you know, this is ridiculous. No one is even trying.

The only way to work is for him to leave and join us. And of course, if someone is convinced about their denomination, they are going to be wanting people to leave other churches and join them. Don't sort of hold that against them in a hyper way.

That's normal, it's part of the human factor. You're excited about OM. Is it wrong to want someone to come on OM for a couple of years? Try to understand the way people think.

Try to understand why they are saying what they are saying, why they are writing what they are writing, and let love cover the differences. And the whole body of Christ will be blessed and helped through that. Number four, the blessing of being interdenominational is that it opens a whole range of doors for service.

There are negative points for being interdenominational, but I believe the positive ones outweigh the negative ones ten to one. One of the advantages is that we often don't have to waste time on secondary things and can get on with the major issues. Number two, we don't have to keep defending ourselves.

OM has become more broad-minded in the past couple of years. I think it's great because we don't have to spend a lot of energy defending things that hardly any of the other parachurch groups believe. Most outstanding Christian leaders don't believe, and I'm talking about godly men.

And so the fact that we are in OM a little more in line today with other evangelical Christians, without denying our distinctives, enables us to get on with the real work of winning men for Christ, spreading the word of God, and all the other things that we have to do. When we're very narrow, when we're just one denomination with one little set of principles, often we become defensive. Have you noticed how defensive many groups and denominations have had to become lately just to survive? As someone said, you know, let all the flowers bloom.

Now, I know that can go out of control, and I guess sometimes in OM we feel it is out of control because the other side of the coin is that we've got to try to build loyalty. We know that people come on OM to Bromley and actually become far more loyal to their local church than they do OM or SDL here. In fact, we know that in the past we've had people stay here bad-mouthing the whole thing for the entire year, very quietly generally, because they were here, they didn't know what to do until the year was over, but they really felt that the real vision was the local New Testament church down the road.

This was really second best. But somehow they managed to fulfill their commitment. We're not completely ignorant of things that happen over and over again.

But I believe that we can build loyalty without manipulation. We can build loyalty without bad-mouthing other groups and other people, putting them down so that we go up. We can esteem others better than ourselves, and we can still somehow create loyalty to cause people to want to stay and work in this kind of vision, in this kind of work, but believe me, it will not be easy.

And it's one of the issues we're really wrestling with. Number five, I believe it's the only way we can logically reach the Muslim world. I don't think we can go down into Turkey and each denomination plant its own church.

We have the Presbyterian Church among the Turks, the Baptist Church among the Turks, the Anglican Church among the Turks. I just, it's just, you know, I like to stretch my mind, but I can't handle that one. And praise God, in Turkey, most of the churches are in fellowship, and they consider themselves just Turkish groups of believers or Turkish churches.

They don't have generally denominational affiliations. And to me, the so-called parachurch or interdenominational way is certainly one of the best ways to penetrate the Muslim world. Number six, it's the only way to cope with unbelief and liberalism, at least in my kind of mind.

I'm the kind that at times is just battling for my faith, much less battling for my denomination. Just to believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. And for me to exclude other believers, I find very demotivating, and I don't want to do it.

And number seven, I believe it's often the way to renewal and revival. History shows that God has used parachurch groups to help bring renewal or interdenominational groups. Think of how the faith mission was mightily used to bring revival in certain parts of Scotland.

The illustrations are endless. Also, revivals have brought into being new movements that have been greatly used of God. Think of the Bible Institute movement, what God did through men like D.L. Moody.

I mean, it's just staggering to the imagination. Do read something of the life and history of D.L. Moody. Do read something of the history of the Billy Graham organization and God working through that.

How can we just say these things are second best? Or that this isn't really what God is into in the 20th century? We just can't do it. Number eight, facing reality of human weakness and error. And number nine, we're short of time, it brings glory to God because of the emphasis on love, the emphasis on oneness of the body of Christ, even when there are tremendous differences.

I hope that you feel it's a privilege to be involved in something that is interdenominational, something that is perhaps classified as parachurch, aware of the negative factors. Realizing these positive factors, I believe, far outweigh the negative factors. Let's not be intimidated by our weaknesses, but let's realize that as we find certain strengths in our work, it will always be in the midst of some weaknesses as well.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the privilege of being involved in what is often thought of as interdenominational or parachurch. We are aware of sometimes the weaknesses, but Father, this morning we've been made aware of the strengths of being in this kind of work, and the way all through history you have used what only recently has been classified as parachurch groups.

And Father, we thank you for both. Most of us are involved in both. We have our own churches.

We have our denominational commitments, and yet we're involved in OM, to take the gospel out to the ends of the earth, to be teams like Acts 13 sent out to do specific work and specific ministry, which in many cases ultimately brings into being new churches, and in some cases even new whole streams or denominations, as some people call them. Father, we need a lot of wisdom in our terminology in this day and age. Different words seem to have different meanings.

We thank you for this great warehouse of powerful books. We know each one of these books can be used of you to help people grow in their faith, to help them understand particular issues, to meet particular needs in their lives at a certain crossroads that they may be in. And we're excited about this, and we're going forth in faith, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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