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CHURCH DENOMINATIONS

Many Protestant Church denominations exist. How do they start? How do they grow? How do they mature? The process has demonstrated a fairly consistent pattern over the last five -plus centuries.

It usually starts from a group of people who share either a common spiritual experience or a commonly shared view of Bible teaching, understanding, or doctrine. They begin by informally meeting together.

It grows when they begin to enthusiastically share their views or experience with other people. Enthusiasm draws people. The gatherings grow.

Eventually, leaders emerge who move to formalize them as an association. In these early years they would generally be considered as a "movement" instead of a "denomination." These movements may last several decades, perhaps even through two or three generations of leadership.

They then become a true denomination as a hierarchy of authority becomes established. Rules are set. Doctrinal teachings become highly defined. The early enthusiasm gradually wanes. They become more rigidly entrenched in teachings and practices. They become more intolerant of views that differ from what they teach.

In the coming days, we will look at some of these processes and how it affects us in today's times. Stay tuned. More tomorrow.