

"Why Are There So Many Churches?" Video Transcript

My wife and I have always attended different churches, but now we have children and we are looking for a church we can attend together. We have been told to choose the one that feels right to us, but with there being so many churches, how can we know what's right?

I've been a member of a number of churches in my lifetime, some big and some small. You name it. They all believe in the same God, but worship in a lot of different ways. Does it really matter?

Growing up, my friends and I did everything together, except church. I have always wondered, why not? If we believe in the same God, why are there so many different churches?

With all the different religions and churches represented in the military, a chaplain holding one service where we can all come together for worship makes it simple. I mean, isn't that just like the church we read about in the Bible?

I heard a preacher say once, that all Christian churches are okay even if they do not all teach the same things. How can that be? I have always been confused by that.

Have you ever wondered why there are so many different churches and practices and beliefs? Is it possible that every denomination is right? Does God approve of this kind of division and confusion, and does it even really matter? Why are there so many different churches? Does it matter to God? Is He pleased with the current situation in the religious world?

If I were to ask you exactly how many different churches exist in the world today, what would you say? You would probably say, "I don't know... a lot I guess." And that would be right. There are a lot! In fact, I looked this up recently. I found that there are approximately 38,000 different churches. 38,000! Friends, that is amazing. And think about how confusing this can be for a person who is seeking the truth. Because you have one church over here that is teaching this practice and another church that is teaching the opposite. One church says that item A is sinful and another church says that item A is mandatory. Who is right? Can they both be right?

And of course, some people will tell you, "That is good! It is good to have variety. Just attend the church of your choice." And they will say, "One church is just as good as another. We are all going to the same place anyway. There are just different paths leading us to the same location."

Dear friend, may I respectfully tell you that the Bible says "God is not the author of confusion".

When I read my New Testament, I read about only one church. But when I look around me today, and I see those who profess Christianity, I see thousands. Now the question is how did we get from one to thousands? And the answer is... something went wrong. Something went severely wrong. But you see, it didn't go wrong with God. It went wrong with man.

Now, here is the first point I want us to observe as we consider this subject together. And that is, in the Bible we read about only one church.

I want you to use your imagination with me for a minute. I want you to imagine that there is such a thing as a time machine. And I want you to imagine that you can get in this time machine and travel back to the first century to the day that the Lord established His church. You get out and you see all of these converts to Christianity, about 3,000 of them. You walk up to one of them and you ask him, "Sir, I would like to know what denomination did you just become a part of?" What would he say? He would probably say, "I don't know what you are talking about." "I mean what church did you become a part of? Was it the Methodist, or Catholic, or the Baptist? Which one was it?" He'd say "Sir, I don't know what you are talking about. I have never heard of a denomination. I have never heard of these

groups you're discussing. All I know is that I became a part of the church that belongs to Jesus Christ: the church of Christ."

And that would be exactly right, because there was only one.

Acts 2:47 says "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." And this fits perfectly with what Jesus promised in Matthew 16:18. He promised "...upon this rock I will build My church." The apostle Paul later echoes the sentiment of the one church as he is speaking to the elders in Ephesus. He tells them to "Shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28)

In the book of Ephesians we are told that God has put all things under Christ's feet and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church which is His body..." And so the church of Christ and the body of Christ are the same thing. And then the singularity of the church is nailed down in Ephesians 4:4 when He says "There is one body."

Dear friend, when one reads the New Testament he is impressed by the fact that there existed only one church.

Well, what if someone came along and wanted to start some different divisions of that one church? Different denominations, if you will. Would that be okay? And the answer to that question is, no. That would not be okay.

I want you to listen to the words of the apostle Paul as he writes to the church in Corinth. He says "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment." (I Corinthians 1:10)

Now friends, how does that mesh with what we see in the religious world today, with all of the different denominations and divisions and sects that are all teaching different things? And the answer is... It does not mesh at all. It is completely foreign to the New Testament concept of the church.

Now, more specifically, what was the problem with the church in Corinth? I want you to listen again. This is verse twelve. Paul says "Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

You see, within the First Century Church, we see the seeds of denominationalism. Some were starting to hold to Paul, while others were holding to Apollos, others were holding to Cephas, to Peter, and others to Christ. Divisions were starting to form and Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, condemns this. And he makes it clear that this is not of God.

Okay, as we seek to answer the question, "Why are there so many churches?" I want us to notice that God predicted that there would be a departure from the New Testament pattern. You see, despite the clarity of the New Testament with regard to the oneness of the church and despite the warnings against division, God knew that divisions would come. In fact, the Bible foretells of it and warns against it several times. One of these warnings comes from a passage we mentioned a moment ago. It's the conversation between Paul and the Ephesian elders. He tells them to "shepherd the church..." which was purchased by the blood of Christ. He says that "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."

Now, it is interesting that Paul tells the leaders of this church of this congregation that a departure would come from them. And the reason that this is so interesting is because one of the first departures in the church was with regard to its leadership and its organization.

Now, another warning concerning departure is found in I Timothy, chapter 4. Let's read this one together. It says, "Now the Spirit speaks expressly [that is, the Holy Spirit is speaking very plainly here] that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies and hypocrisy,

having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." We will see in history that two of the specific departures that will later take place relate to forbidding marriage and not being allowed to eat certain foods.

Now, thus far we see that according to the New Testament pattern there was only one church, but we also see that God predicted that there would be a departure from that New Testament pattern.

Alright, let's get to the key question. Why are there so many churches today? How did a basic Bible belief system with a unified group of people turn into literally thousands of different denominations with different practices and different beliefs?

Well, history tells us that very early on there came along splinter groups who had ideas and doctrines contrary to that of the first century church and contrary to the doctrine that they had received and practiced. Some of these groups include the Gnostics around A.D. 125, the Montanists around A.D. 156, the Manicheans around A.D. 244, and the Novations around A.D. 251.

Now, one of the largest and most significant divisions that relates to the early church relates to its leadership and involved the Roman Emperor by the name of Constantine. Now, from the beginning of God's plan it was to have elders and deacons in the church. And you can read about this in I Timothy and Titus. And these elders had authority only over the congregations where they were members. That is the way God established it. Each congregation was autonomous. But you see, over time elders began meeting together to discuss problems relating to the various congregations.

When you get to the 300s A.D. the Roman Emperor Constantine was starting to have interest in this growing group of people known as the church of Christ. In A.D. 313 he passed the Edict of Milan which ended the persecution against Christians. And you can imagine this gained in favor with Christians in and around Rome. And so the Roman government began gaining a lot of influence with elders in the church of Christ and the end result was a very adverse effect on a large portion of Christ's church. You see, this new relationship led to a meeting between elders in the church of Christ and Roman officials. This meeting took place in A.D. 325 and history calls this event "The Council of Nicea". This meeting gave rise to the first officially recognized departure from the original New Testament church.

Now, this newly created denomination took a Latin word, "Catholic", which is translated "universal," and established a hierarchy very similar to that of the Roman government. They literally took the example of the Roman government and built a church that was based on that model. And so, in this new church there were men who were over several churches or groups of churches which was a very clear departure from the New Testament pattern. Now, Christians who were faithful to the Bible, those who stood against this newly created Catholic denomination, they were persecuted and ostracized. They had to meet in hiding. But the pure New Testament church of Christ continued to exist.

Now, historically speaking, after the formation and establishment of this Catholic church, it grew in strength and number and political power. They created new doctrines and man-made traditions and they enjoyed growing political endorsements from the Roman government. In time their doctrines were made mandates and required of all of the members of the Catholic church. Notice the dates on the chart as the Catholic church implemented some of these doctrines long after the formation of their denomination. There was Latin Mass, Purgatory, The First Official Pope (they called him "God on Earth"), Transubstantiation, the mandate of the celibacy of the priest in 1015.

Now, if you will look at the timeline you will see that for the first thousand years there were really only two churches. You had the church of Christ that began on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. That still existed. And then there was Catholicism.

Now, history tells us that in 1054 the Catholic church split into two denominations. You had Roman Catholicism and the Greek Orthodox Church. Now, during this time the Bible became more and more unavailable to the common man. And this period became known as The Dark Ages. And the Catholic church just continued to add man made doctrines. Examples include indulgences in 1192, the "Confessional Booth" in 1215, sprinkling replaced immersion for baptism in 1311, and the Pope was declared infallible.

Now, by the time you get to the 1500's you will see a lot of activity on the timeline. This is because there were men such as Martin Luther who began to stand up and say "This is not right!" Martin Luther was a German monk and he hated the selling of indulgences. He challenged the Pope saying "The Bible is only source of authority." Martin Luther's widespread opposition to the Catholic church ignited a protest movement which is historically known as The Protestant Reformation.

In 1521, another denomination appeared shortly before the Lutheran church came on the scene. It was known as the Anabaptists. They started as a protest against the Catholic church and its practice of infant baptism. "Ana" means "again". They baptized again those who had been baptized as babies in the Catholic church.

But what is really interesting, is that the Anabaptist movement spawned several other churches to include the Baptist, the Amish, the Mennonites, and Brethren in Christ. And as religious freedom expanded, denominationalism continued to grow and to multiply into dozens of factions and you can see that on the timeline. And this laid the foundation for a multitude of denominations that exist in our present day.

Some of these churches began with a noble desire to break free from some clearly unscriptural practices. Others began with less than noble reasoning. You will notice on the chart that the church of England started in 1534. This church began as a result of King Henry VIII's desire to have his marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled. When the Roman Catholic church wouldn't grant his annulment, the result was the separation from the Catholic church and the formation of a new church, the Church of England.

Well, what is the point of all of that? The point is, if you look at the chart, the timeline, it represents just a small fraction of churches that exist today. Some began with good motives and others began with bad motives, but all of them were started by men.

Now, if you will go back to the top of the chart you will see the green line that represents the church started by Jesus Christ. This is the church that began in A.D. 33 in Jerusalem. It is the church of Christ, the one we read about in the pages of the New Testament. And from history, we see that all other churches were man-made denominations.

Hopefully now, you can see why there are so many churches. And here is the message that we really need to take to heart. Since Jesus condemns division, we need to be a part of that one church that Jesus established, the one that He bought with His blood. Not one of the man-made churches that came along later in history.

Now, what does all this mean for us today? Does this mean that denominations are wrong? Dear friend, we want to be kind but we want to be clear. And the answer is... yes, it would have to mean that. All churches other than the one built by Jesus Christ exist without New Testament authority or example.

Now somebody says, "Does that mean that good intentioned, morally upright people in denominations will be lost?" Well, let's let the Lord answer this question. I want you to listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

Dear friend, observe with me that Jesus says that on the day of judgement there will be good people, people who are teachers, people who claim to hold to the name of Jesus, people who will be lost because they haven't done the will of the Father. Now, the point is, having good intentions is not enough. Having my heart right is not enough. I actually have to follow the New Testament pattern.

I want you to listen again to the words of Acts 2:47 A...praising God and having favor with all the people. The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." Friend, all of the saved people are in the church. That one built by Jesus, the same one that existed in Acts chapter two, the same one that we read about throughout the New Testament, the one that existed prior to all the denominations of man.

Now, the question is "How do I become a part of that church? The one wherein is salvation. How do I become a part of the one church of the New Testament?" And the answer is... the same way they did it in the New Testament. You've got to obey the Gospel.

You know sometimes people in the religious world will tell you that "There is nothing you have to obey." They will say that "You only need to believe." But I want you to listen to the words of 2nd Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 7 and 8. The Bible says, "...and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,"

Now listen to this. He is describing the day of judgement. He says that some people are going to receive rest; some people are going to receive punishment. He says "when the Lord comes in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God..." Now listen. "...and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Your see, we must obey the gospel. Now, obeying the gospel can be summed up in five short words: hear, believe, repent, confess, and baptism.

Now, somebody says "What does that mean, explain that." Well first, a man must hear the gospel. He hears that because of his sin he has transgressed the will of God and is destined to die eternally in Hell. (Romans 6:23) "The wages of sin is death." He also hears that Jesus Christ came as God in the flesh to pay the penalty for his sin so that he does not have to. He hears that salvation is found in Christ. Romans 10:14 indicates if a person does not hear the message of the Gospel he has no hope.

Now, upon hearing it he must also believe it. Now what does that entail? What must a man believe? He must believe, he must understand that Jesus is the Christ the son of God. In John 8:24 Jesus said, "If you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins." He must understand that Jesus is deity. (John 1:14) "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." He must of course believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, how it is that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) "Then he arose, defeating death." (1st Corinthians 15:54 55) And Romans 10:9 says, "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Of course, it is crucial, it is crucial that a man believe and understand the body of Christ, which is the church of the New Testament. 2nd Timothy, 2:10, says, "salvation is in Christ."

Then a man must repent. Acts, chapter 17, verse 30, says "Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent." Repentance is a change of mind, brought about by Godly sorrow, that results in a reformation of life. That is important to understand. Sometimes people will say, "Repentance is merely changing your life." That is not a good definition of repentance. Repentance is changing your mind. Of course, that is followed by a change of life.

But then, step number four. A person must confess his faith in Christ. Romans 10, verse 10, clearly tells us, "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." In Acts, chapter 8, as Philip was teaching the gospel to the Ethiopian, he said, "See here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Philip responded to the Ethiopian and said, "If you believe with all of your heart, you may." And

he answered and said, "I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God." That is the confession we are talking about. Not a confession of our sin, but a confession of what we have heard and what we believe. It is an acknowledgment: "Yes, we believe these things."

Now finally, involved in obeying the gospel, one must be baptized. In Mark 16, verse 16, Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." You know, baptism as practiced by 1st century Christians was total immersion. In fact, that is the meaning of baptism. It is the point at which a person is immersed in water and the point at which he contacts the saving blood of Jesus. It is the point at which he has finally obeyed the gospel. Romans 6:3 and 4 says, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." And so, we are buried in the watery grave of baptism. Jesus shed his blood in his death. In baptism we are buried into his death. We contact that saving blood of Christ and our sins are washed away. That's why we come out of that watery grave of baptism to walk in newness of life.

Once you have done those things, Acts 2:47 says the Lord will add you to the church. Friends, the church of Christ still exists today just as it did in the 1st century. You know some people misunderstand the church of Christ. They think that it is "just another denomination" alongside a string of denominations. But I can assure you that the church of Christ has no earthly head, no legal hierarchy, it wasn't started by any man, and it follows no man made creeds or practices.

The church of Christ just follows the New Testament pattern found in the Bible. We meet on the first day of the week to take communion. We sing a cappella, the way the church did in the first century. We pray. We study the Bible together. We hear preaching together. We give financially according to how God has blessed us. Christ is our only head. The church is composed of elders and deacons and evangelists and members, just as it was 2000 years ago. We abide only in the doctrine of Christ. We cast away all man made doctrines and creeds. We are Christians only.

Friends, we are not advocating that anyone leave his denomination to join our denomination. We are advocating that men leave all denominations and simply be a part of the one church of Christ, the one that existed hundreds of years before the churches of today, the one that we read about in the Bible.