

HOME BIBLE STUDY

~ Lesson 9 ~

WHERE DID ALL THE CHURCHES COME FROM?

In our last study, we examined the identifying marks of the original church. We saw that it is possible to believe and practice those very same things today. Yet, as we consider the original church another question arises: "Where did all the different churches come from?" Since Jesus built His church (Matt. 16:18) and it follows only His word (1 Cor. 4:6; 14:37); why are there so many different names and organizations? Why do so many people have their own ways to worship and to enter Christ? Why do men teach conflicting doctrines? Friends, many think denominationalism is acceptable to God or even beneficial. Yet, let us look to God's word and examine what He says about it.

THE SCRIPTURES PREDICTED APOSTASY

After Jesus established His church, the apostles worked zealously to maintain the growth and faithfulness of the local assemblies. The book of Acts and all the letters to the churches show that the apostles of Christ not only taught the truth, but also stood firmly against error.

Jesus foresaw danger when He warned: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but are inwardly ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15). How will we know when a wolf is in our midst? "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matt. 7:16). We must examine what they teach and do by the light of God's word.

Paul identified the coming of these wolves as ones that would affect the

organization of the church. Paul told the **bishops** of Ephesus, "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; **and from among your own selves** shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:28-31). Some in the leadership would rise up and attempt to create a personal following.

Could this problem be prevented? Paul added, "And now I commend you to God, and to **the word of his grace**, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified." (Acts 20:32) Abiding in God's word protects us from wolves and apostasy. But differing from God's word results in apostasy.

Paul also wrote that Christ's second coming would not occur until the "falling away" and the "man of sin" come. This man will "oppose and exalt himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God" (2 Thess. 2:3-4). This man will place himself in a position to be worshipped as God. This is a grievous sin, for only God is to be worshipped (Matt. 4:10).

During the first century, the Holy Spirit worked through the apostles as a restraining force against this apostasy (2 Thess. 2:5-7). Yet, when the apostles died, the man of sin was no longer hindered. He had "power and signs and lying wonders" so as to appear to work miracles (2:9). Yet he is actually a deceiver and full of unrighteousness (2:10). Those who do not have the love of the truth followed after him, believing his lies (2:10-13).

How can we withstand him? How can we avoid this "man of sin" who deceives so many people into worshipping him as God? By loving the

truth (2:10-13)! We must zealously pursue and study the truth, then we will be able to know the difference between true miracles and false ones. We will then be able to see the difference between true religion and false religion. It is the truth that sets us free from slavery to sin and death (John 8:31-32).

Next we see that Paul speaks of "falling away from the faith" as those who give heed to doctrines and teachings that do not originate with God (2 Tim. 4:1). Hypocritical men will come teaching things that they do not practice themselves (4:2). What are some of the doctrines they will teach? They will come "forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats" (4:3). Friends, do you recognize of whom the Bible speaks? If not, then read on...

THE FALLING AWAY (100-1300 AD)

As Paul predicted, apostasy arose first in the organization of the church. While the original church had a **plurality** (two or more) of elders (also called bishops) in **every** local church (Acts 14:23), an early distinction elevated some bishops over others. Ignatius (110-117 AD) wrote that "monarchal bishops" were over the cities of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Philadelphia and Smyrna in his lifetime. And by 160 AD such "monarchs" were found in almost all the local churches.

In addition, from 160 to 190 AD, these Monarchal Bishops began to be seen as successors to the apostles. They began to have counsels and synods to decide religious matters, rather than just going to the Book of God. They also began making a "clergy" and "laity" distinction. Yet the scriptures uphold the fact that ALL Christians are a holy priesthood unto the Lord (1 Peter 2:5-9).

In the 200's AD, Bishops increased their authority from just being over one church to being over many churches.

Bishops in larger cities carried more weight than ones in smaller cities and were called "arch-bishops". Soon, Bishops in leading churches (such as Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople) were called "Patriarchs" or "chief fathers".

From 325 to 600 AD the apostasy worsened. An Emperor of Rome, Constantine, called a council of Bishops in Nicea, June 325. This was done in order to "settle" questions about the Deity of Jesus. In 343 AD, the council of Sardacea decided that if a Bishop was deposed, he may appeal to the bishop of Rome for retrial. No successor could be appointed until Rome decided. Then the first "universal council" was held in Nicea, Italy in 355 BC. Next, Innocent I (402-417 AD) claimed that he, as Bishop of Rome, had universal jurisdiction over all the churches. As the Roman Empire fell in 476 AD, the Roman Bishop became even more powerful politically.

Eventually, the Bishop of Constantinople, John the Faster, attempted to declare himself "Universal Bishop" in 588 AD. But Gregory, the Bishop of Rome, called him the "anti-Christ". Interestingly enough, it was Gregory who took the title "Universal Bishop" for himself in 606 AD. What he condemned in another, he himself now practiced.

Thus the position of "Pope" came into being long after the first century. And the religious title "Pope", which means "Father", was specifically forbidden by Christ (Matt. 23:9). The "Pope" even is called the "Vicar of Christ", which means "substitute for Christ". Just as 2 Thess. 2:3-4 predicted the Pope sets himself forth as God. Yet, Jesus said only God is to be



worshipped (Matt. 4:4). Interestingly, Peter rejected every attempt to bow and worship him (Acts 10:25-26), unlike the head of the Catholic Church.

Between 600 and 1300 AD, history is described as the "Dark Ages". During this time there was a division between the East and West (1054 AD). The East refused to add icons and musical instruments to their worship, but the West added both. Thus was formed the Roman Catholic Church (in the West) and the Greek Orthodox Church (in the East). These organizations and their doctrines were very different from the simple New Testament pattern. They had deviated from truth and traveled very far from what the original church was like.

THE REFORMATION (1300 - 1800 AD)

While the Dark Ages were a time of stagnation and intellectual "darkness", the Crusades against Islam (1070 - 1272 AD) brought an exchange of ideas and an "awakening" of reason (the Renaissance Movement). It was during this time of increasing rational thought that men began to question Catholicism.

Martin Luther wrote his 95 Theses in 1517. He did not seek to start a new church, but he did seek to **reform** the Catholic Church. Luther's view on authority was that the Catholic Church could **retain any practice that was not specifically forbidden** by Scriptures. This principle ignores the fact that God's silence is **not** permission (Heb. 7:12-14; 1 Pet. 4:11).

Also, while the Catholic Church resisted allowing the "laity" to have access to the Bible (even going so far as to chain Bibles to their pulpits and to burn Bibles that were printed for the common people); Luther translated the Bible into the language of the common people of Germany.

The following statement by Luther stands out: "I ask that men make no reference to my name, and call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? My doctrine, I am sure, is not mine, I have not been crucified for anyone. St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3, would not allow Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I, poor, foul carcass that I am, come to have men give to the children of Christ a name derived from my worthless name? No, no dear friends; let us abolish all party names, and call ourselves Christians after Him Whose doctrine we have" (via "Denominational Doctrines" by Dawson p. 14). Yet, in 1530 AD, his followers did not take heed to his earnest request and they formed the "Lutheran" church.

In 1534, King Henry VIII broke with Catholicism and formed the Church of England. He did this because the Pope of Rome refused to grant him a divorce from his present wife. Yet, he also had political reasons. When he broke from Rome, the English people who gave their money and willed their property to "the church" would now be giving it to King Henry VIII as head of the church!

Next, we see that John Calvin of France formulated his 5 points of Calvinism. By 1535 he taught that all men **inherit a sinful nature**, that **election** was **unconditional**, that Christ's **atonement** was **only for the elect**, that **no one** could **resist the moving of the Holy Spirit**, and that once you were elected you could **never fall from grace**.

Briefly considering these points, Matt. 18:3 shows that children are innocent and do **not** have a depraved nature. Also, Ezek. 18:20 rules out the possibility of inheriting Adam's guilt. Second Pet. 3:9, and many other passages, teach that election / salvation **is conditional**. First John 2:2 clearly states that Christ's atonement was not just for

those who are saved, but for the whole world. Acts 7:51 plainly says the Holy Spirit can be resisted. And Galatians 5:4 obviously says people can "fall from grace". However Calvin came up with his doctrines, he did not get them from a proper understanding of Scriptures.

Even though Calvin's system is unscriptural, his ideas have influenced almost all Protestant denominations and quite a few others. His work resulted more directly, though, in forming the Presbyterian Church.

By 1729, John Wesley reformed the Church of England. Of special note was the following: "Would to God that all party names, and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world, were forgot and that the very name [Methodist] might never be mentioned more, but be buried in eternal oblivion. (Ibid p. 14). Groups that have come from his efforts include the Methodists, Wesleyans, Nazarenes and other Holiness Pentecostal groups.

Even the renowned Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon said, "I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living! I hope that the Baptist name will soon perish, but let Christ's name last forever." (Ibid p. 15) Today, we have at least 26 different Baptist denominations in the USA.

There are many, many more examples of reformers that could be listed. Yet this is sufficient to show that the "Protestant Reformation" was a period of time where men attempted to reform or protest against the Catholic.

THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT (1800-1900)

In the 1800's a religious movement began that saw denominationalism as it truly is, divisive and unscriptural. This "back to the Bible" movement began with a number of people in Europe and in America that were independent of each

other, but who eventually began to associate together solely on the basis of what the Scriptures teach. While the process was not easy, this movement did produce a large-scale rejection of denominational names, organizations, forms of worship, creeds and doctrines.

It is during this time that men began to use the simple description of "church of Christ". Some, because of the renewed use of this descriptive name, consider this the beginning of "the Church of Christ". Yet, look back to the Bible and see that this name is found in Romans 16:16. Even so, some press the issue and declare: "Alexander Campbell founded the church of Christ." While history admits that Alexander Campbell played a significant role in the restoration movement, I deny that he "founded" the Lord's church. This is as absurd as saying that Isaac Newton "created" gravity when the apple fell upon his head. Gravity already existed, yet most people did not clearly identify it. The church of Christ already existed in the first century and it's pattern and plan is preserved for us in the Scriptures. All some people began doing in the 1800's was to begin leaving off denominational doctrines and practices in order to return to that simple Bible way.

So, while Alexander Campbell is known for scriptural statements like, "we speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent" (cp. 1 Peter 4:11) and has done much in returning people to many important Bible truths; yet he has held to some things which are not according to God's word. For example, he believed that many churches could pool their resources and work through a missionary society. This organization is foreign to the Scriptures and violates the local organization revealed in the New Testament (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). The largest religious organization revealed in the Bible is the local church. There was never a centralization of earthly

organization revealed in the New Testament. This (and other things) shows that while Campbell in many ways returned to the simple Bible pattern, he yet stumbled over the age-old problem of the organization of the church.

DENOMINATIONALISM VERSUS ORIGINAL ORGANIZATION

When we look at history, we see that the fearful predictions of apostasy have come true. Today there are thousands of different denominations and churches, all claiming to be "one with Christ". They all teach different things, yet all claim to follow the same Bible. They all practice different things, but all claim to honor the same Lord and Savior. Friends, it takes more than the Bible to make a Methodist, Baptist, or Catholic. And what you do to become a Baptist is not what you do to become a Methodist. And what you do to be a Methodist is not what you do to be a Catholic. Even so, few seem to be troubled with the fact that all these different churches and doctrines **are not found in the Scriptures**. We are told to believe that all these divided and divisive ways are some how "united in Christ". Yet if one man taught all these different doctrines himself, he would immediately be considered a nut case. Friends, how do we make sense of all this? How do we sort through it all and find our way back to the simplicity of the gospel as Jesus established in the first century (2 Cor. 11:3)?

The answer is in the Book of God. Jesus prayed for unity **according to the truth** (John 17:17-23), not "unity in diversity" of organizations, names, forms of worship, and doctrines. Paul urged Christians to not allow division to exist among them, but rather to be of the same mind and be perfected together (1 Cor. 1:10). He also warned that those who teach or practice

things contrary to what was revealed in the original teachings of the gospel should be "turned away from" because they "serve not our Lord Christ, but their own desires" (Rom. 16:17-18). In other words, one true test of a person's commitment to Christ is whether they will be satisfied with the simple truth of the gospel, or whether they will reject that truth. When men make churches into what they want them to be, they have forgotten that a church needs to be what God wants it to be. The purpose of the church is to teach conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:29), not conformity to man's desires (Rom. 12:2).

Thus, a denomination is a church with an unscriptural organization. The word denomination has also commonly been applied to any church that has deviated from God's word in other ways, not just organization. Remember the warning given in Revelation 22:18-19, "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, **if any man shall add unto them**, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and **if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy**, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book." Adding to or taking away from God's word is a **serious** thing.

THE DANGER OF CREEDS

An additional note must be added regarding creeds. Creeds may produce a degree of unity within a particular denomination, yet they hinder unity beyond that. While we see that the apostles commanded us to prove all things by the Bible (1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1-6); we find that creeds encourage people to approach the Bible with an interpretation **already in mind**. One who trusts in a creed, finds it more difficult to

examine the Scriptures since they are persuaded to understand the Scriptures in light of their creed. Thus, creeds are dangerous and a great cause of unbelief. Creeds are walls that prevent Biblical unity. Creeds arbitrarily draw lines between those who profess faith in Christ. Only the Bible is the basis for unity and fellowship. Only the Scriptures make "the man of God complete" and equipped him "unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Thus, if a creed says anything **more** than the Bible it says too much. If a creed says anything **less** than the Bible it says too little. If a creed says **the same** as the Bible, then that creed is not needed because we already have the Bible.

CONCLUSION

This lesson needs your serious attention and deep understanding. The world is filled with denominations and division. People praise and promote this division when they say, "Choose the church of your choice!" As long as people do this, then Jesus' prayer for unity will go unanswered (John 17:17-21). Instead of choosing what pleases us, we need to look for what pleases God. We need to **choose the church of God's choice**.

Friends, will you be a part of that which goes against Jesus' prayer? Or will you give up all the divisive and man made ways in order to follow the simple teachings of Jesus Christ as found in your New Testament?

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 "For God is not the author of confusion...  
 If any man thinks himself to be a prophet, or  
 spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things  
 which I **write** unto you, that they are  
**the commandment of the Lord.**"  
 (1 Cor. 14:33, 37)  
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"All **scripture** is **inspired of God** is also profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be **complete**, furnished **completely** unto every good work."
 (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
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"Sanctify them **in the truth**: thy word is truth. ...Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be **one**... that the world may believe that thou didst send me." (Jn 17:17-21)  
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"Beloved, believe **not** every spirit, but **prove the spirits**, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. ...They are of the world: therefore speak they as of the world, and the world heareth them. **We** [the apostles] are of God: he that knoweth God **heareth us**; he who is **not** of God heareth us **not**. **By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.**" (1 Jn 4:1, 5-6)
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"I marvel that ye are so quickly **removing** from him that called you in the grace of Christ **unto a different gospel**; which is **not** another gospel only there are some that **trouble** you, and would **pervert** the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you **any gospel other than** that which we preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so say I now again, if any man preacheth unto you **any gospel other than** that which ye received, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:6-9)

Please complete the Home Bible Study questions page for this lesson, then send it in to be checked. After checking it, we will return it with the next lesson in the series. If you have any questions please write them down and let us know. We are here to serve you and will point to the Bible for the answer to all things.

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