

Why are there so many denominations?

Jesus Has Only One Church!

JESUS BUILT ONLY ONE CHURCH!

Have you ever wondered why there are so many denominations in the "Christian" religion? If there is only one God, and only one Lord Jesus Christ, and only one Bible, why are there so many denominations? Each of these groups have doctrines and traditions that are peculiar to that particular denomination. Did you know that the Bible strictly condemns this practice? While some suggest that it is not possible or necessary for all to believe the same things and teach the same things, God has commanded precisely that.

1 Corinthians 1:10-13:

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"

If every denomination rejected their peculiar doctrines and traditions to follow only the New Testament pattern for the church and faith, how many confessions would there be? Only one! Would we not then be obeying the part of the Holy Scriptures we have just read?

One leader in a traditional denominational church asked, "Why should we go back to the Bible pattern?" In his conversation he made his belief clear, 'It does not matter if we change the church to satisfy our traditions.' No effort was made to show where the

practices or organization of this denomination are found in the New Testament, but simply to say it really doesn't make a difference.

IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Why is it important to follow only the New Testament pattern for the church? To understand this, we must first recognize that we will be judged for eternity based entirely upon what is written in the New Testament. Jesus said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). The teaching of the New Testament is the message of Jesus Christ. Although he did not teach all things while he was on the earth, the inspired apostles and writers wrote the words of Christ after he ascended into heaven. The Old Testament was written at the direction of the Holy Spirit.

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

So, the New Testament was given by the Holy Spirit also.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come," (John 16:12-13).

WHAT ABOUT TRADITIONS?

One might ask, "Is it acceptable to practice the traditions of the church fathers?" This is a very good question and one that every person needs to consider. Traditions are not sinful, so long as they do not become doctrine, and do not require any departure from Biblical truth. It has never been acceptable to God when people 'add to' or 'take from' any part of

his word, not even to make room for traditions. The Israelites were not to change the old Law, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2). The New Testament ends with this warning to those who would presume to change God's word for any reason,

"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that 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 out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18-19).

The wise king Solomon of the Israelites wrote, "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add not thou unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar," (Proverbs 30:5-6). Though this is in the Old Testament, the principle continues today under the New Testament. The apostle Paul wrote, "...yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged" (Romans 3:4).

Jesus taught that when we change the word of God to make room for our traditions, we destroy the effectiveness of the word of God. God's word will not help us if we decide to replace even part of it with our traditions!

Mark 7:5-9:

"Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart

is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."

Mark 7:13

"Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."

You should notice that Jesus spoke of those whose hearts are far from him. Someone might suggest that if our heart is close to God, then, traditions would not have the same effect. Jesus said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him," (John 14:21). Also he said in verse 23, "If a man love me, he will keep my words..." We can only conclude that if we obey the teachings of Jesus, then our heart is with him and we love him. Yet, if we do not obey him so we can keep the traditions of the church while we might have great affection for him, he said we do not love him.

According to the tradition of the 'church fathers' the decisions made at the councils or synods represent God's law. This tradition itself represents a departure from the teachings of Christ. We must only believe their decisions if the Bible teaches the same. The best test of this is to ask, "Is there something in addition to or does it retract from the Bible?" No person may offer anything different from what has already been written nor honestly teach it as the word of God. In Galatians 1:6-9, Paul warned about following these other doctrines.

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ

unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

To help understand the depth of this command, please consider the meaning of the ancient Greek word for 'accursed' which is 'anathema' and means to execrate, or condemn as abominable. Those who teach a changed gospel will lead their followers to hell and must be considered condemned!

Obviously you may decide freely whose teaching you wish to believe. Remember that your eternal destiny will depend upon your choice.

The denominational bodies of today hold many traditions that represent a departure from the New Testament pattern. The church of Jesus Christ exists today but it only includes those people who:

- ▶ Speak where the Bible speaks.
- ▶ Are silent where the Bible is silent.
- ▶ Do Bible things in Bible ways.
- ▶ Call Bible things by Bible names.

You can be a part of the New Testament church by simply obeying the pure gospel of Christ. When you do this, you will not be a part of any denominational body. You will be a Christian, nothing more, nothing less, and a part of the only church which Jesus built.

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by
Randy Watson

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