



Why Is the Church Divided?

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INTRODUCTION

Does it matter what is taught, believed and practiced in religion? Christ teaches that it does matter what we believe because it can mean the difference between going to heaven or hell. Matthew 7:13-14: **Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it.**

There is only one road (doctrine) that leads to heaven. It is narrow, leaving no room for change. But the way to destruction is broad. To travel it, one can believe anything he wishes. It sounds full of comfort to say that all churches are acceptable to God but the Bible does not support such an idea. Why is this true? How did the church become divided into many teachings?

THE CHURCH DEPARTED FROM THE TRUTH

From the time Christianity first began, it was opposed and persecuted by nonbelievers and heathen authorities. For the first 300 years, paganism was the popular religion. Christians were tortured and killed in an effort to destroy the church that Christ built. Many Christians denied their faith to keep from dying. During this time many in the church began to depart from the truth, gradually making changes in the apostles' teaching. Many principles of truth and faith that Christ gave to the church to follow were changed to fit man's ideas and opinions.

People who make changes in the truth are enemies of Christ disguised as faithful believers. They were known and described in the New Testament as "ravenous wolves" who came into the church to destroy the truth with lies, Acts 20:28-31 There will always be people who exchange the truth for a lie to suit their own desires. Disloyalty to Christ will continue until time on the earth ends. Many people willingly allow themselves to be deceived by others. Satan uses our sins to lure others away from God so they will lose their souls. In the early church, some had the desire to be elevated above others, wanting the power to rule over them. It was used by Satan to cause a departure from the truth. This had already happened while the apostles were still alive. They warned the church of what was happening and told them to remain in the truth. [1 Timothy 4; 2 Peter 2; Galatians 1; 2 Thessalonians 2; Acts 20; 2 Timothy 4) Romans overtook and destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, just as was predicted in Matthew 24. Pagan authorities and those under the Roman Popes tortured many to death. Christians were fed to the lions, their bodies were torn apart, and their eyes were plucked out in an effort to make them deny the truth. Because of human weaknesses, many in the church gradually sacrificed the truth of God and accepted the creeds of men. Christ had promised that the church would not be destroyed, and it

will never be. But during this period of time, the truth was suppressed and practiced by only a few Christians and their efforts are not recorded in history books.

In A.D. 325, the Nicene Creed was developed by Constantine as a measuring stick to force Christians to conform. Constantine thought of himself as the high priest of Christianity. The truth continued to decline. Some of the changes that were brought about in the church were:

1. The **authority of elders**. It was Christ's plan for the church to have a plurality of elders to oversee the congregation. It was changed. One elder rose to power above the rest taking the rule.
2. The more powerful men **formed councils and synods** to force their ideas on the people. They did away with having a plurality of elders to oversee the congregation. The preacher became the leader instead..
3. Then the preacher evolved into the **priest** who ran the affairs of the church. Members of the church went to the priest for forgiveness of their sins, instead of praying to Christ themselves.
4. **Changes** were made in the **Lord's Supper**. The priest blessed it, pronouncing it as the real body and blood of Jesus. Instead of having the memorial of Christ each week, as the early Christians were taught to do by the apostles, it was changed to every three months or observed once a year.
5. **Repentance**, which means to turn away from sin, was **changed to penance for sins**, meaning to inflict punishment on a person who has sinned. Permission to sin was even sold **for large amounts of money by some of the priests**.
6. **Total Depravity**, which is the idea that people are born with a sinful nature supposedly inherited from Adam, was accepted by many people. They began to baptize babies.
7. Soon after infant baptism, **sprinkling** was substituted for immersion in water as the way of baptism.
8. **Vocal singing** was changed when the organ and piano were brought into worship services. Using other types of instruments followed the organ and now many churches use an entire band in the worship. They use Old Testament Scriptures to justify the use of these instruments.

There have been many other changes made in the church over the years. It did not happen suddenly but was so gradual that people didn't realize they were being pulled into error until it was too late. Before public schools came into being and the invention of the printing press, books were scarce and many people could not read or write. This contributed to the people's ignorance of the truth. Few people had a New Testament, and the Bible was difficult to read for many.

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When the Catholic church came into power, it ruled for several hundred years. In the year 1054, the Catholic Church separated between Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic. Four hundred years passed before the invention of the printing press. Ignorance and oppression began to break. Rome resisted every effort toward civil and religious liberty but was unable to withstand the Word of God. People were determined to learn it.

Denominations broke off from the Catholic church and began to practice their own doctrine and brand of Christianity. In 1521 the Episcopal church began; the Presbyterian church in 1521; the Baptist church in 1611; the Quakers in 1655; the Methodist in 1729, to name only a few.

In 1870, the Catholic church declared the Pope to be infallible. This meant the people believed him to be perfect, without sin. Until that time Christians had believed that Christ was the only one who had lived as a man without sin. This is a serious error, but it is still believed today.

There are hundreds of different religious beliefs in our world. Think for a moment how far man has departed from the truth in religion. The one true church that Christ built has been divided and changed into many different teachings and most of these do not resemble the truth as it was when it first began. What man has failed to see is that when the truth is changed, it is no longer the truth; it is a lie.

The New Testament church never went completely out of existence, for Christ promised that no power known to man was strong enough to destroy it in Matthew 16:18. "***Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.***"

The history of the church was recorded almost entirely by the Catholic Church during the time mentioned above and we do not have records to prove its existence. We know it was not completely wiped out because of Christ's promise.

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY RESTORED

In the early part of the nineteenth century, a movement began to do away with human creeds and practices. The main idea behind this movement was to use the blueprint of the Lord's church in the New Testament. People were learning the truth by reading the Scriptures. Many wanted to use only the Bible as their authority because they could see by its evidences that the Bible was inspired by God, able to furnish man with the entire truth, 2 Timothy 3:16-17. They learned from Ephesians 4 there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. They wanted to do away with religious divisions in the church. They wanted the church to wear Christ's name as it had in the first century. They wanted to worship in the same simple manner that Christians had been instructed to do by the apostles.

The movement faced great difficulty in the beginning because many people liked the changes in the church and wanted to keep it that way. These people fought against the restoration of New Testament Christianity. Those who started the movement made great sacrifices by leaving their denominational churches to take part in this effort. They left friends and family behind and were cruelly criticized and persecuted for trying to restore the truth. But these brave, pioneers of the

truth strongly believed in restoring the church; that division is wrong. The church is not acceptable to Christ unless it follows His pattern in the New Testament.

Any change in the truth is bad because it distorts the truth and makes it a lie. A small departure from the truth leads to larger ones. Many churches teach false doctrines about how to be saved. Wrong information concerning salvation can cause people to lose their souls. It is so important to know the truth on every subject.

The movement to restore New Testament Christianity is still going strong. In your own community there are people dedicated to this effort. They do not seek to start a new denomination. The pattern they use is the one Christ established for the church in 33 A.D. It is His plan, not man's. These people invite you to investigate what they are doing. Don't take their word for anything. Search the Bible for the answers to all doctrinal matters. And finally, they invite you to join them in this effort. You will need to leave your denomination with its creeds which men have made. Following the truth is worth it. The church today must be the same as the one that Christ died for in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, we read about a man named Cornelius who worshipped God sincerely, thinking it was true worship. God recognized that he was sincere. He sent Peter to Cornelius for the purpose of teaching him correctly so that he could be saved. Though Cornelius had a sincere heart and pure motives in his worship, it was not correct. Peter taught him the New Law of Christ. He obeyed it and was saved. What if Cornelius had refused to believe the new information that Peter gave to him from God? He could have said, "*I like my way. I will continue in it.*" He was already a very religious man. If he had refused to obey, his religion would have been useless. Salvation is given on God's terms, not man's. As a result of their obedience, Cornelius and his household learned the truth and were saved, Acts 10, 11.

Ask your teacher for the name and address of a church of Christ in your community that is dedicated to restoring New Testament Christianity. Find out how to obey the gospel of Jesus so that you will be saved and added to His church.