

Why are There so Many Churches?

Part 2

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Ephesians 4:16: "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

Philippians 1:15 KJV : "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and **strife**; and some also of good will."

Philippians 2:3 KJV : "Let nothing be done through **strife** or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

James 3:14 KJV: "But if ye have bitter envying and **strife** in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth."

James 3:16 KJV: "For where envying and **strife** is, there is confusion and every evil work."

"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 Paul. It's the conversation between Paul and the Ephesians elders. He tells them to "shepherd the church..." which was purchased by the blood of Christ. He says, "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. 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.

From the beginning, God's plan was to have elders and deacons in the church. You can read about this in I Timothy and Titus. 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. You can imagine this gained in favor with Christians in and around Rome. 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. 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. 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—were persecuted and ostracized. They had to meet in hiding. But the pure New Testament church of Christ **continued to exist**. Historically speaking after the formation and establishment of this Catholic church, it grew in strength and number and political power. They created new doctrines, 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 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 was really only two churches. You had the church of Christ that began on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem that still existed. Then there was Catholicism. History tells us that in 1054 the Catholic church split into two denominations. You had Roman Catholicism and the Greek Orthodox Church. During this time the Bible became more and more **un**available to the common man. This period became known as 'The Dark Ages.'

Timeline:

Beginning of A. D. – New Testament Church established on the day of Pentecost after Jesus returned to Heaven. This was the time when A.D. was added to the date; remember, before this time the date used B.C.

125 A.D. – Gnostics

156 A.D. – Montanists

244 A.D. – Manicheans

251 A. D. – Novations

300 A.D. – Roman Emperor Constantine interested in the people connected to the Church of Christ

313 A. D. – Edict of Milan ended persecution of Christians

325 A.D. – The Council of Necea – This marked the **First official departure** from the original New Testament church which embraced the hierarchy of the Roman government creating the Catholic denomination.

1054 A.D. – The Catholic church split into Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodox Church.