

# Sermon: Why Are There So Many Churches?

Text: [I Corinthians 1:10-17 ESV](#)

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January 8, 2023

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**Divisions in the Church**

**10** I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. **11** For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. **12** What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? **14** I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. **16** (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) **17** For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

**Introduction:** Have you ever visited a church like that? You can feel the tension as you open the door.

**Illus.** A few years ago we visited two churches while we were on vacation. One in Cincinnati was 1200+ membership – only one person said hello, the service was lifeless in a beautiful building – like memorial services in a mausoleum. The other in Battle Creek, MI was very friendly – we felt at home and very welcome. Visitors should always feel welcomed.

Those that were from the household of Chloe, possibly servants, noticed the congregation at Corinth was having problems getting along with each other. There is always a danger when people are put up on a pedestal in a religious context. You might remember cult leaders like Jim Jones, David Koresh, and Luc Jouret being another example, where 53 people in Switzerland and Quebec committed suicide or were murdered. These were members of a group called the *Solar Temple*. Choose your leaders and who you trust, carefully.

But the Corinthian church was different. None of the factions had gotten the approval of Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Christ, for that matter, to behave this way. In fact, all most certainly would have disapproved.

Most divisions in the Church are a result of strong personality and power games rather than doctrine. Typically people do not select a church based on doctrinal grounds, today, but because of relationships, programs offered and amenities. Divisions are not a new phenomena. Today, we are going to look at two thousand years of church history in about 35 minutes, so hold on to your pew.

There were problems during:

## I. The Early Church (Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, etc)

If Paul were around today, there is no doubt he would be writing all of us letters for our churches.

The early Church had its share of disagreements and dissension. Paul and Barnabas, Paul and John Mark, and Paul and Peter certainly had their differences.

### Galatians 2:1-6 ESV

### Paul Accepted by the Apostles

<sup>1</sup> Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. <sup>2</sup> I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. <sup>3</sup> But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—<sup>5</sup> to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. <sup>6</sup> And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.

Back in Corinth there was a group WITHIN the church that was elevating Paul to a position that was improper and causing friction. And Paul didn't like it.

#### A. Paul

This group (**The Liberty Party**) may have emphasized liberty to the point of license. In Romans 6, Paul writes, **Romans 6:1-2a ESV** <sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2a</sup> By no means!

Paul had come from a very strict and rigid theological background. His emphasis on grace as opposed to works as a means to salvation may have been misunderstood. (Antinomianism, i.e. no rules and against law)

## B. Apollos

This group (**The Intellectual Party**) was more than likely the better educated members in the church. They did DEEP Bible studies. They had an elitist attitude that because they knew more – that made them better Christians. (Intimidating) They may have used allegory to explain Scripture.

**Illus.** Here is an example of the method of interpretation they may have used: The Epistle of Barnabas, an Alexandrian work (Apollos' hometown), argues from a comparison of **Genesis 14:14** and **18:23** that Abraham had a household of 318 people whom he circumcised. The Greek for 18 (the Greeks used letters as symbols for numbers) is iota followed by eta, which are also the first two letters of Jesus' name; and the Greek for 300 is the letter tau, which is the shape of a cross. Therefore this old incident is a prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus they said.

Paul later in his letter says, "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of the age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom (conventional wisdom – GLW) of the world?"

Apollos had been well-trained in the word of God and in philosophy, but he knew that head-faith was not enough. A lot of people know their catechisms and can recite Scripture, but do not know Jesus. They only know about Him.

## C. Cephas (Peter)

This group (**The Judaizing Party**) were trying to impose legalism and old forms of the Jewish faith on the Church. They were promoting fasts, festivals, circumcision, dietary plans, etc. Rules, rules, rules.

Then there is the group who claimed Christ as their leader.

## D. Christ

This group (**The Exclusive Party**) thought they were the most spiritual of the people who attended First Christian Church in Corinth. Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians wrote: **II Corinthians 10:7 ESV** <sup>7</sup>Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.

Some churches and some cults today like the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others falsely claim to be the only true church. Many groups teach all other churches are heretics or apostates.

## II. The Reformation and Following

### A. Martin Luther - Lutherans

He was first heard from, about 1517. He was a German Augustinian monk. He tried to reform the Roman Catholic Church. He was not originally interested in starting another church.

After being defeated in a debate with Professor John Eck, Luther said not only the reigning Pope, but all popes were the “collective anti-Christ.” Luther did not do well in Public Relations 101. **Kirk Havel - remark about Missouri Synod**

### B. Ulrich Zwingli (Anabaptists, e.g., Amish, Mennonite, German Baptists, Church of the Brethren)

He also disagreed with the Roman Catholic Church and then had a “falling out” with Luther over the issue of the Lord’s Supper. Luther believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but it depended upon the faith of the believer. Zwingli thought of the Lord’s Supper much like what we do – as a memorial meal or even feast.

### C. Jean Calvin - Presbyterians

Calvin believed man was born “totally depraved” and that God selected who would be saved (predestination) and who would be damned. Even though he thought mankind to be totally depraved, he promoted a very puritanical lifestyle. Talk about asking the impossible! **Like asking a turtle to jump. Presbyterians have fractured (Geneva College)**

### D. John Wesley – Methodism

There are certainly many things that could be mentioned here, but the emphasis on perfectionism and holy living while fighting against social injustices became a trademark for this group. They also formed a denomination and have splintered many times since the beginning.

There are Wesleyans, Free Methodists, United Methodists, Evangelical Methodists, and most recently The Global Methodist Church has been organized.

Our Restoration Movement has had many similar fractures from its early 1800’s beginnings. The Acapella Church of Christ formally separated about 1906 and the Disciples of Christ formed a denomination in 1968. We remain independant and certainly more conservative from the Disciples in most ways.

There are over 45,000 church denominations worldwide. Not so many years ago, certainly in my lifetime it was half that - while that is nothing to brag about.

### **III. The Restoration Movement**

The Restoration Movement was started by various groups who came together.

#### **A. Barton Stone/Alexander and Thomas Campbell – Presbyterian**

Stone in the early 1800's removed his congregation from the Cumberland Presbytery in Kentucky. In doing so, this group formed what became the Cane Ridge Christian Church (site of Cane Ridge revival). In the book *Attitudes and Consequences*, Homer Hailey writes, "These people were calling themselves 'Christians,' rejecting human creeds and party names, appealing only to the Bible for their guidance in faith and conduct."

By 1832, the Campbell group organized in Pennsylvania calling themselves Christian Churches far outnumbered Stone's group. It was during this time they all came together to form the largest and fastest growing religious organization for its time.

#### **B. James O'Kelly – Methodist**

O'Kelly from Virginia made the first effort toward restoring the New Testament Church. Several Methodist Churches took on the name of "Christian" only.

#### **C. Abner Jones/ Elias Smith – Baptist**

Abner Jones was from the Vermont and New Hampshire area. He broke away from the Baptist church in 1801 for the purpose of returning to the "old paths."

Elias Smith in 1807 from Connecticut led his Baptist congregation into the New Testament position. Later in 1812 the two groups merged efforts and called themselves "Christians."

The Restoration Movement is still a viable principle.

- What's wrong with using only the Bible for understanding God's will?  
(say) **NOTHING**
- What's wrong with the name Christian for all believers instead of denominational labels?
- What's wrong with wanting Christ's Church united?
- What's wrong with the idea of "where the Bible speaks, we speak; and where it is silent, we are silent?"

One of our slogans is: “We are not the only Christians. We are Christians only.”

#### IV. Current Thought

A. What people want (survey) compiled by Laura Wisniewski in the 90s.

Two questions: Where do you attend church, and why are there so many churches?

5% Thought the survey was contrived to invite them to our church who admitted church membership elsewhere.

31% Of people wanted to be left alone and didn’t want to answer any stupid survey.

31% Had no opinion or answer.

31% Had an opinion.

In a world full of all kinds of choices, there are churches for everyone. Most people want variety. In our survey, the word “different” was used for why there were so many churches. They said:

People are different*	People want different things
People are too different to agree	People believe different things

Someone summed it up with a cliché: “different strokes for different folks.” The more I thought about the responses, the more I thought of how distorted a view of Church people sometimes have.

The Church is for God and others mostly  
It should be what God/Jesus want, not what we want necessarily.

The Church is talked about in terms of variety and different gifts and ministry, but Paul makes it clear in the Ephesian letter that there is only ONE CHURCH.

Peter, on the day of Pentecost, stood before a very diverse group, but there was no need for different doctrine. The plan of salvation was made clear. Most everything else probably does not matter as much.

B. Liberal Trends

Those who would deny the virgin birth, the deity of Christ and his uniqueness as God’s only Son must accept correct teaching or be excluded from the fellowship.

**The Bible must be accepted as God's Word, otherwise anyone's word, while claiming inspiration from God, is as good as anyone else.**

**The acceptance of immorality as normal for Christians is unacceptable.**

**Let's go back to the Bible and let it speak to us and then do what it says.**

**Let's see:**

**C. What the "churches of Christ/Christian Churches" offer**

**The churches of Christ offer a back-to-the-Bible approach to Christianity. We are trying to be the Church as God established it in the first century regarding beliefs. This does not make us out-of-step with God – only the culture. As the Church we should offer the same ordinances that Jesus established:**

**The Lord's Supper as a memorial feast**

**Baptism by immersion in water for the forgiveness of sin – We do that!**

**As the Church, we should offer salvation by keeping the standards the same as those of the Bible. We cannot cave to political and cultural pressure to change God's requirements for entrance into the Kingdom of God.**

**Conclusion:** The Church today is too divided over unimportant, non-salvation issues. This is hurting our witness for Christ. I do not believe our group is the only group going to heaven. Jesus wants His Church restored to its original beliefs and condition. The enemy is Satan – not those who follow Jesus as Lord. We need to work together not to elevate our leaders or denomination, but to bring honor and glory to the true Head of the Church – JESUS CHRIST, OUR LORD!

**I Corinthians 1:10 ESV** 10 I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

**This is still God's plea today that the church "be united in the same mind and the same judgment." The word καταρτιζω, translated united (joined together in KJV) is a term that means to put in order, to restore even to its original or former condition.**

**Illus.** Austin Healey restoration. A purist would never change anything. I love the Church more than any of my cars.

**There was the question on the survey:**

**“Why do you think there are so many different churches?”**

**“People worship God – read the Bible for themselves and gather with others who interpret the scriptures as they do.”**

**“People are not able to get along always.”**

**“Different personalities – different interpretations”**

**“People focus more on the differences in what they believe than the likenesses.”**

**“We differ in understanding.”**

**“Variety of tastes in worship.”**

**“Our nation’s history is about independence of the individual – they use that freedom to choose where and how they would like to worship.”**

**“Means of God using many, many different ways to reach many, many different people. God is aware that each individual is different and prefers to worship in different ways.”**

**Is “how we worship,” really a salvation issue? [Discuss St. Luis Potosi experience with the two churches we attended.](#) [Wayne Hayes & Ted and Wanda Murray](#)**

**“God accommodates different personalities – different strokes for different folks.”**

**“Various interpretations of Scripture by man.” There are “[KJV](#) only” churches!**

**Here is what Jesus wants for His Church: [John 17:22-26 ESV](#) <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. <sup>24</sup> Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. <sup>25</sup> O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”**