

IF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST SHOULD CLOSE

Some people would like the church of Christ to close its doors. What would happen if the church goes out of business?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the church of Christ that meets at Gandy. Good morning and welcome to this program.

If the church of Christ should close its doors, there would be no voice calling for the restoration of the unity of Jesus' church. The denominations would be all that's left; the denominations that do not want to be any different than what they have become; the denominations teach that everyone is okay, but then they do not worship together with anyone else because they like the division just the way it is. They like their traditions. If the church of Christ should close its doors, what would be left? The Baptists in several varieties would be left, along with the Presbyterians, the Methodists, (so-called mainline denominations); a large variety of Pentecostal groups would be left. The Catholics would be left along with those who call themselves "the true church", the Orthodox. In a recent article in a magazine entitled "The Christian Post," it was reported that Southern Baptists experienced its seventh straight year of declining membership. However, it was noted that decline is also being experienced by many of the so-called "mainline denominations." The Assemblies of God, on the other hand, are reported to have experienced its 24th year of growth in those attending its assemblies. The Assemblies of God is associated with the Pentecostal groups. Yes, the denominations of the world are perfectly happy with division.

If the Churches of Christ should close, then there would be no one left to call for unity on the basis of the Bible alone! Every group expresses belief in the Bible. But most denominations do not really believe in practicing church according to the authority of the New Testament. Instead, they write a manual of faith that governs the affairs of the denomination without much regard for the New Testament of Jesus Christ. And those churches who describe themselves as "undenominational", nevertheless, generally teach denominational doctrines.

Some churches call themselves "Bible believing" churches, but they really do not listen to the Bible. For instance, a so-called "Bible believing church" may have only one pastor, so they have corrupted the New Testament pattern that shows that New Testament churches of Christ had more than one pastor in each congregation. Jesus' apostle Peter wrote to some Christians and said, "[God's] divine power has granted to us **all things that pertain to life and godliness**, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of lust." (2 Peter 1:2-4)

Where else can a person find "all things that pertain to life and godliness" except in the knowledge of the Christ who called us by his glory and excellence. And where else can you locate this knowledge except in the Holy Spirit's inspired New Testament of Jesus Christ? If the Holy Spirit inspired the New Testament, which He did, then why would anyone want to establish their own church-rules for worship and the work of the church? Jesus himself said to his apostles, "**you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.**" (Matthew 23:8-10) The Christ sent His Holy Spirit to inspire his apostles and prophets in establishing and organizing His church. If a group of religious people are **not** the church of Christ then it has no reason to exist! That's right! Jesus' apostle Paul wrote that there is but "one body" (Ephesians 4:4). And spiritually speaking, that one body is the church over which Jesus is the head. It is the church of Jesus Christ.

Do you think the divisions we see in the world were caused by Christ? It is true that Jesus predicted stress and strife because of him. "**Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.**" (Matthew 10:34-38) Here is a division that is necessary!

You see, this division is between those who believe and obey Jesus Christ and those who will not. Jesus predicted that a believer's enemies will be those of his own household. In some families not all the family members will believe and obey Jesus Christ. Not everyone will "take up" a cross and follow Jesus. Have you noticed how the unbelievers of the world hate Christians? Those girls who were kidnapped in Nigeria were believers in Christ. And the kidnappers say they are going to make good Muslim girls out of them! Those church buildings that are being demolished by the Chinese government are the buildings where "believers" meet. In that part of Ukraine, closest to the Russian border, some churches of Christ were ordered out of their Sunday morning assemblies by armed militant pro-Russian people. That action will force all of those believers to go "underground" again, just like it was in the old communist days, the days of Mao, the days of Stalin and Krushchev. There is a division in the world between believers and unbelievers; that is the division that Jesus sanctioned. And that division has happened in every generation where the gospel has gone.

But Jesus wanted his followers to be united. However, if the church of Christ closes its doors who will stand for unity? Who seeks the unity of believers on the basis of the Bible only? Shouldn't all believers be searching the scriptures to find the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of

peace"? What "unity"? The Spirit's unity. Where on earth can you find the Spirit's unity? You can only find it in the document that the Spirit wrote! But what do we see in the world. We see these denominations maintaining the divisions they have caused. They debate and fight just to maintain their denomination. No denomination should be defended. The church of Jesus Christ should be defended! The church of the New Testament should be defended. The truth of the good news should be defended. Jude wrote to Christians and said, "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." (Jude 1:3-4)

Friends, even today "the grace of our God" has been perverted into sensuality, that is, so many people are seeking sensual pleasures. And they loved to see it in church! They arrange their worship services into a big entertainment event. The choirs, the bands, and the quartets entertain the worshippers by giving them musical pleasure. The sermons tickle the ears rather than grounding the hearers in the doctrine of Christ. They appeal to human emotions rather than to the mind of Christ. Paul predicted it when he wrote, "the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." (2 Timothy 4:3-4) It is extremely difficult to study the Bible objectively, without denominational prejudice. But objectivity is necessary in order to understand and apply the doctrine of Christ.

Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16) Who but the church of Christ will quote this saying and believe and practice it? Whoever believes the gospel and is baptized will be saved. What do the denominations teach? "Whoever believes will be saved, and then baptism is optional." That's it! That is what you hear on the television shows. That is what you hear on the radio. "Whoever believes will be saved," then find yourself a "Bible-believing" church. If the church you choose teaches baptism for some reason then you can be baptized two or three weeks later, that is, if you want to join that church. Once I was studying the Bible with a superintendent of a large denominational Bible school. I asked him what happens when a person comes before his church to announce his or her salvation. He described the situation by saying, "the Pastor asks the believer if he wants to join the church." I asked, "What would happen if the person who announces salvation does not want to be baptized?" He said, "You know, that happened not long ago." I was on the edge of my seat! "What happened?" I asked. He said, "Well, our Pastor referred him to the church down the street where you can be a member without being baptized." Friends, this is the state of Protestant, evangelical, denominationalism in the world

today. It matters not what Jesus commanded! *Whatever feels comfortable to you is what you should do!* And this situation cannot be any better because the denominations are not interested in listening to all of the Holy Spirit's truth, written in the Word of God. They are locked! They are locked into their man-made doctrinal traditions that have come down from previous generations. And they pick and choose only those doctrines that seem to suggest their traditions.

Friends, the Bible has come down to our generation. It is the Word of God. You can have a personal copy in your own language. You can sit at the feet of the apostles and prophets of Jesus Christ. You can sit at the feet of the Master himself! When people differ about interpretations they should study the differences in the light of the whole Bible. God does not contradict himself. That should be the cornerstone of all Bible study! We should seek the interpretation that harmonizes **all** the verses. We should seek to understand what God teaches by believing every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. God's interpretation is there somewhere. Will you search for it? When you find God's interpretation you will have found *harmony*. And when men and women of opposing groups can sit down and objectively search for the *harmony*, then we can find the unity described by the apostle Paul. "I appeal to you, brethren, 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." (1 [Corinthians 1:10](#))

If the church of Christ should close where would be the voice that calls for God's kind of unity?