

RESTORING THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH (3)
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In a world divided by religious bodies of every doctrine and practice, Churches of Christ plead for the unity of all believers in Jesus Christ on the basis of the Word of God. This means that manuals and disciplines and catechisms written by men are rejected as the foundation of faith and practice. Although most of us are accustomed to religious division, stop and ask yourself: is this really God's plan for those who believe in Christ?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Welcome to this program.

Did Jesus die to bring about the confusion that exists in the religious world? No. We know that he died in order to bring about the unity of all peoples, nations, and languages so that all could stand together united in Christ on the truth revealed in the Bible.

Jesus' apostle Paul wrote to the church of the Ephesians, "...We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh ...were...separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:10-13)

Friends, "in Christ Jesus" God brings people together. God does not intend for believers in Christ to hate one another, and or to be opposed to one another, working against one another. The Blood of Christ has brought those purchased by it into fellowship in the church of Jesus Christ. Paul told the elders of the church of Christ at Ephesus that they must pay close attention to themselves and the church over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers. Paul told them "to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28)

The apostle Paul refused to be content when he heard that there were divisions in the church of Christ at Corinth. "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 judgment.” (1 Corinthians 1:10) Paul described the division as Christians calling themselves by different names. Some were saying, “I am of Paul”, others were saying “I am of Apollos”, “I of Cephas”, or some were saying “I am of Christ.” There was only one of these correct. Christians should say, “I am of Christ.” But these who say “I am of Christ” should not think that Christ is divided and that they are just one of the sects! And neither should the others! Christians should not think in terms of division! Paul went on to ask some important questions to get the Corinthians to think. Maybe these questions should also make us stop and think! “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:13, 14) Three questions. Let us think each one of these questions.

Question number one: “Is Christ divided?” Obviously, the answer is “NO”. Christ cannot be divided; he is what He is! His body (spiritually speaking) is the church. The church is not to be divided. If there is division in the church it is because humans have made divisions. It is because of sin. It is because someone is thinking too small. Someone is not talking to someone else. Or it may be caused by something more sinister. Someone wants to draw away disciples after himself. Paul warned the Ephesian elders about this. He told them that men would arise from among the eldership who, like fierce wolves, would seek to devour the flock. And how would those men devour the flock? Those men would speak perverse things, “to draw away disciples after them.” (Acts 20:29, 30) “Perverse things” are disobedient things...things that deviate from the teachings of Christ and His apostles. This is the work of Satan. Friends, let us refuse to divide Christ by going after perverse teachings.

The second question Paul asked: “Was Paul crucified for you?” The reason Paul names himself in this question is because some of the Corinthians were making him party leader. They were saying, “I am of Paul.” Obviously, the answer to the question is no! Since Jesus was crucified for the world of sinners, why be called by the name of Paul? Why shouldn't we be called by the name of Christ? Peter wrote, “...if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.” Christians glorify God in that name, the name of Christian. The word “Christian” means “of Christ.” If we are supposed to glorify God in the name “Christian”, then why don't we? Why would we choose Paul's

name, or Apollos' name, Peter's name, or any other name that denominations wear? What name do you glorify: Catholic, Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist, Lutheran, Pentecostal? Who are you? Are you a Christian? Why be called anything else? I cringe when people call me "church of Christ." That's right! I am a Christian. I am not a member of a sect. I was added to Christ's church when I was immersed into Christ. If you were baptized into Christ, the Lord added you too. You and I are brethren in the Lord. Why should we be called by different names? Because someone started using these names to separate the followers of Christ. So you think the Devil had something to do with this? Ah yes, friends, perverse things have been spoken...things that deviate from the teachings of Christ.

The third question Paul asked would not have been asked by the denominations of the world. Paul asked: "Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" The religious world of our day would not ask this question because they do not think highly of baptism. Nor do the religious leaders of the world teach baptism. You can listen all day long to television preachers and not one of them will teach what Christ and the apostles taught about baptism. They do not think it is important for you to know what God's Word teaches on baptism! The answer to Paul's question is NO, they were not baptized in the name of Paul? In whose name then were the Corinthians baptized? They all were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Every Corinthian had heard a message like Peter preached on Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins." (Acts 2:38) Remission means forgiveness. Every New Testament preacher of the gospel obeyed the command of Jesus to "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19) Paul was not ashamed that he had baptized some at Corinth. But he was glad that his helpers had done most of the baptizing, lest those Corinthians should say that Paul baptized in his own name. Were the Corinthians baptized in the name of Paul? Absolutely not! They had been baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. Therefore, they belonged to Christ. They were Christians.

Friends, according to the inspired apostle Paul there is not but one baptism. (Ephesians 4:4) But look around you in this world and you will discover several baptisms. And if you are baptized by one church, then that baptism is not any good for the next church. If you want to be a member of another denomination, then you'll have to submit to their baptism. Friends, the only criteria by which

you can judge whether or not your baptism is real is whether you have obeyed Christ's command to "repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins." (Acts 2:38) Have you obeyed that command?

Christ's command of baptism is considered "controversial." Why? Because there are people who want to controvert it! These people cannot take Christ at his word. They cannot believe that baptism has anything to do with their salvation. So they come up with other purposes for baptism. For instance, baptism is not for the remission of sins, it is because of the remission of sins. They say baptism is NOT for lost people, it is for saved people. They say it is an outward sign of an inward grace. On and on people use all kinds of language to describe baptism except the language used by Christ and the apostles! That should tell you something friends!

This is one example as to why there is religious division among followers of Christ because there are men and women who speak "perverse things." They cannot speak according to the oracles of God, because they do not really believe them. They prefer to interpret the words of scripture to suit themselves rather than allow God's Word to interpret itself.

Once a false teaching gets ingrained into a church, then the institution must defend it no matter how unscriptural the teaching may be. In order to keep this from happening, believers in Christ must keep themselves in the Holy Scriptures, speaking where the scripture speaks, and remaining silent where the scripture is silent.

In the last chapter of the Bible, the apostle John wrote, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Revelation 22:18, 19)