

RESTORING THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH (4)**“Neither Catholic, Orthodox, nor Protestant”****WDXE – September 11, 2011**

Can a Christian be neither Catholic, Orthodox, nor Protestant? Believers in Christ are usually grouped into these three categories. Out of all the so-called Christians in the world one estimate is that 50% are Catholic, 21% are Protestants, and 11% are Orthodox. The other 18% call themselves “Christians” but do not wish to be grouped in those three categories. “Are you a Catholic, or Orthodox, or Protestant?” Can I be just a Christian? Can YOU be just a Christian?

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

If I say that I am JUST a Christian, then you may interpret that to mean that I’m not a member of any church at all. On the contrary, being just a Christian means that I am a member of the church Jesus added me to. Acts 2:47 says that Jesus adds to the church daily those who are saved. I believe in Jesus. I believe that he is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. And upon that faith, I repented of my sins and was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of my sins. Upon my reception of God’s great forgiveness, the Lord Jesus added me to his church. Now this is the only way a person can become a member of the church of Christ. He must be added by the Lord himself. No one can vote on my membership. You cannot decline my membership. If from the heart I have obeyed the Lord’s command to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized, then the Lord has granted forgiveness, according to his promise, and added me to his church. I am not a member of a man-made organization. The church Jesus built cannot be categorized as Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant.

In the first century several New Testament prophecies forecast a departure from the faith. These passages describe some characteristics of the departure. Now the church of Christ was established on the Jewish holiday of Pentecost, around the year 30 A.D. Twenty years later, around 50 A.D., Jesus’ apostle Paul wrote to the church of Christ at Thessalonica Greece concerning the Lord’s second coming. Paul assured those Christians that Jesus is coming again, but not immediately.

Paul told the Thessalonians that they were not to believe anyone who said that Jesus had already come. Paul wrote:

2Th 2:1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers,

2Th 2:2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

2Th 2:3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion (the apostasy) comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

2Th 2:4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

In this passage, Paul predicted that a “rebellion” would come. The Greek word used here is the word “apostasy.” The word literally means to “stand over against.” The rebellion would result in the rise of a “man of lawlessness,” that is, there will arise a man upon whom the law has no affect. This man has taken upon himself the authority to believe and act as he pleases. He answers to no one, not even God. This man is called the “son of destruction.” Judas Iscariot was also referred to as the “son of destruction” because of his betrayal of Christ (John 17:12). Well, the man that Paul predicts...would also betray Christ by supplanting Christ’s authority as the head of the church. Paul predicts that this “son of destruction” will take a seat in the “temple of God.” In 1 Corinthians 3:16 and other places the apostle Paul refers to the church of Christ as the “temple of God.” Therefore, this sinful man will be a Christian, a member of the church of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this man of sin will exalt “himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God (or the church), proclaiming himself to be God.” This refers to the authority that this person will take upon himself, ruling over the church and every “god or object of worship.”

One writer has written that “No apostasy of magnitude, which could answer to Paul’s description, occurred in the history of the church for centuries, but [this apostasy was characterized by] the gradual [decline], corruption, and departure from the ancient faith, which was fully developed a few hundred years later— People's New Testament.

Friends, in the words of Adam Clarke, “true Christian worship is the worship of the one and only God, through the one and only Mediator, the man Christ Jesus.

The foundational characteristics of Catholicism began to be developed during the lifetime of the Apostle Paul. Paul affirmed that the mystery of iniquity was even then at work. But it would take a long time for it to develop into the creation of the man of sin. True Christians are neither Catholic, Orthodox, nor Protestant. Catholicism and Orthodoxy have turned away from the worship of the one God through the one mediator Jesus Christ. That’s right! These two movements that grew together until they split in have departed from the faith and substituted other mediators whom they solicit for blessings. They exalt and adore saints and angels. They make icons to place in their houses and churches. This is idolatry, pure and simple. These religions encourage the worship of images. They pray to angels and saints; they invoke the protection and help of saints. They adore the Virgin Mary, whom they say was perpetually a virgin. They fall down and worship before her image! This is the grand corruption of the Christian Church: this is the apostasy as it is emphatically called in 2 Thessalonians 2, predicted by the apostle Paul. The man of sin is the Bishop of Rome; not meaning any pope in particular, but the office in general. The Pope is the chief head and supporter of this great apostasy. Rather than being God’s Vicar on earth –this office is the great adversary of God and man; this office has led in persecuting and destroying the church of Christ. All through the centuries there have been those Christians who have preferred the word of God to the authority of men. These faithful Christians have always had the Popes and the Patriarchies of the Orthodox church to deal with! The pagan emperors of Rome may have slain their thousands of innocent Christians; but the Christian bishops have slain their ten thousands in the name of heresy. The foundation for exalting chief bishops was laid in the apostle's days, but the superstructure was only raised by degrees. It took several centuries before the building of apostasy was completed, and the superiority of the bishops was revealed in full maturity.

Ironically enough, the thing that hindered the rapid rise of these Christian Bishops was the rule of the pagan Roman emperors. Even after the Roman emperor Constantine brought peace to the Christians, the Roman emperors did not allow the Christian Bishops widespread authority. However, when the Roman empire was dissolved and broken into pieces, the Holy Roman empire, the man of sin,

was raised upon its ruins. In the same proportion as the power of the Roman empire decreased, the authority of the Apostate Church increased. Finally, the Bishopric of Rome, and later the Patriarchy of Constantinople grew up above everything, both religious and civil. The man of sin was fully manifested and revealed.

But Paul also predicted the destruction of the man of sin. When he comes again, the Lord will consume the man of sin with the breath of his mouth. This shows that the apostate church with all its traditions, false doctrines, and idolatries will be in the world deceiving people until the Lord returns to this earth. (Condensed and adapted by LM from Adam Clarke's Commentary)

I am happy to tell you that there is an alternative to being a Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. You can be just a New Testament Christian. You can read and follow the instructions that you find in the New Testament of Jesus Christ. You can believe the Gospel and obey it. You don't need a priesthood to stand between you and God. Jesus himself is your High Priest. In Romans 1:5, Paul wrote, "We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations...." Paul's job as an apostle was to bring about the faithful obedience of all those who heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That is our goal also. We want you to obey the gospel. We want you to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God and the savior of the world. We want you to turn away from your sins and confess that Jesus is the Christ of God. We want you to be buried in a watery grave and resurrected to a new life in Jesus Christ. "Old things ... passed away, behold, all things ... become new." (2 Cor. 5:17.)

You will need someone's help with that burial in water. We can help you. Friends, in the words of Paul we say, "Let no one deceive you in any way." (2 Thess 2:3 (ESV))