

# WHY SO MANY DENOMINATIONS?

*Is Christ divided? There are hundreds of denominations in Christendom – and many other little groups and sects. Why? When did this confusion originate? It's hard to believe, but it's true! The facts of history – both biblical and secular – are utterly astonishing. It's time we looked behind this curtain. It's time you knew how, when and where all this religious confusion started.*

**E**VERY thinking person – every denomination – realizes that, at some time in history, there has been a great apostasy or falling away from original truth.

## **Only One Church**

Jesus Christ did not found many denominations. Christ said, "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18 – all citations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.) He did build it – one Church, commissioned to preach and to publish His Gospel – the very message He brought from God – to all the world.

But what do we find today? Hundreds of different and disagreeing churches, all founded by men, each professing to teach the truth, yet contradicting and disagreeing with all the others.

## **The Church in Prophecy**

While most people today suppose that the true Church was rapidly to grow big, to become a powerful organization, exerting powerful influence on the world, making this a better world, becoming the stabilizing influence of the world's civilization, actually Christ founded His Church for no such purpose.

In His final prayer for His one Church, Jesus prayed: "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world ... Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are.... I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil *one*. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:9-16).

Those of His Church are they who do not belong to this world. They are strangers and foreigners, ambassadors for Christ.

This true Church of God was to be persecuted – scattered. "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you," said Jesus to His disciples (John 15:20). "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

This persecution and scattering began early. Notice Acts 8:1: "At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

Nowhere is there any prophecy that the one True Church should become great and powerful, exerting influence in this world. Rather, Jesus called it the "little flock" (Luke 12:32). Despised, persecuted, scattered by the world – separate from the world. Scattered, but never divided. Always one Church, speaking the same thing (1 Cor. 1:10) – never many differing sects! [*Editorial update: This is an amazing statement, originally written three decades before Herbert W. Armstrong died. Since then, a wave of apostasy has come in, and what happened in the early Church happened all over again in this modern era. Many do not realize that the groups that arose after the modern apostasy were not following what Mr. Armstrong himself had told us to do, in his last sermon before he died: "And you will remain united and you will remain one. And your eternity depends on that. Every one of you, don't you forget it." There is a way to remain united and remain one.*] **See our article: "Unity Is Possible!" Article in preparation.**

You haven't read much of the history of *that* Church! Even the historians have never known where to look for the true Church – for they do not know what the true Church is!

### **Broad Majority Deceived**

On the other hand, in the world, all the prophecies foretold apostasy, deception and division.

Jesus foretold the very first event to come on the world – *great deception* – climaxing, in *our* day now just ahead, in great tribulation!

"Take heed," He said, "that no man deceive you, For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ; and shall deceive *many!*" (Matt. 24:4-5, Authorized Version).

Notice carefully. It was not the *few* who were to be deceived, but the many. It was the *few* who were to become true Christians!

Jesus pictured this same condition, when He said, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

That isn't what the world believes, is it? Probably that isn't what you have heard and come to assume. But it's what Christ said. How deceived this world has become!

Satan is pictured in the Bible as the god of this world. He appears, not as a devil, but as a god – as an angel of light (2 Cor. 4:4; 11:13-14). And in Revelation 12:9, you can read of "Satan, who deceives the whole world."

Yes, many would come in the Jesus' name, proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ – yes, preaching Christ to the world. And yet, without realizing it, deceiving the world.

## **Apostles Knew What Would Happen**

The apostles, instructed directly by Jesus Christ Himself, warned the Church about the departure from the faith that would begin to occur at the close of their ministry.

Scarcely 20 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, the apostle Paul, in one of his first inspired letters, cautioned Christians not to be deceived by false preaching or by false letters purporting to be from the apostles: "Let no one deceive you by any means: *for that Day* [the time of God's intervention in human affairs, when Jesus Christ will return to rule the nations] *will not come* unless the falling away comes first" (2 Thess. 2:3).

In Acts 20:29-30, the teacher of the gentiles explains how the apostasy would begin. He gathered the elders (ministers) of the Church at Ephesus to deliver them a final message concerning their responsibility over the local congregations. "For," said Paul, "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." Why? "To draw away the disciples after themselves." To gain a personal following for themselves. To start new denominations!

Do you catch the full significance of these two verses? The elders or ministers were especially assembled because, immediately after Paul would leave Ephesus, there would come within the local church congregations false ministers, wolves in sheep's clothing, to make a prey of Christians. And even from those elders already in the church congregations some would pervert the doctrine of Jesus to secure a following for themselves.

In instructing the evangelist Timothy, Paul instructed him to "convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires" – wanting do to what they please – "... they will heap up for themselves teachers" – encourage ministers who will preach what they want to hear "and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:2-4). This was in the days of the apostles and evangelists. Many who fellowshipped in the local congregations of the early Church, after about two generations, did not endure sound doctrine because they had not really repented and therefore had never received the Holy Spirit. They followed teachers who, for the sake of money, pleased their wishes by preaching fables – the enticing fables of mysticism and sun worship that were engulfing the Roman Empire.

When Paul wrote his second letter to the gentile-born Thessalonians, he instructed them about "the mystery of iniquity" that was already working (2 Thess. 2:7). Notice: Teachings of lawlessness were at work in Paul's day. The Roman world was filled with mystery religions that stemmed from the old sun-worshiping mysteries.

Many of them found that by including the name of Jesus their following increased.

Jude had to include in his letter the admonition that every Christian should "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men

have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ .... These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit" (Jude 3-4, 19). They taught penance, not repentance.

Jude says that these preachers separated their followers from the body of believers.

By the time John wrote his epistles, he had this sad note included about those who at first, crept in unnoticed: "They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19, Authorized Version).

Although these numerous deceivers, called Gnostics, left the true Church, drawing away disciples after them, their following did not last for more than some few centuries.

There was, however, an even more dangerous apostasy that infiltrated the true Church.

### **True Christians Forced Out**

Peter warned the churches that many would be misled. There were false teachers among Christians who would bring in heresies and many would follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of the truth would be blasphemed (2 Peter 2:2).

The letters of Paul were twisted to give another meaning than intended (2 Peter 3:15-16). But instead of leaving the local congregations and forming their own sects, as others had done at first, these false teachers remained within the congregations and soon began to expel the true Christians. [*Editorial note: This has happened in our day! Some associates of the Bible Fund have been put out of local congregations for upholding the true teachings!*]

In the letter of the apostle John to Gaius, we read: "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids them who wish to, putting them out of the church" (3 John 9-10).

The true Christians, who alone comprised the true Church, were being put out of the visible, organized congregations! These were the scattered ones of whom John said, "Therefore the world does not know us" (1 John 3:1).

The name Christian was being carried away by leaders who crept into the fellowship of the Church of God, captured the local congregations and, in the name of Christ, deceived the many into following their false teachings as if it were Christ's Gospel.

### **The Age of Shadows**

Following the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the deaths of the apostles, a

strange phenomenon is witnessed. The true Church almost disappears from history, and false churches arise.

Of this period, the English historian Edward Gibbon says: "The scanty and suspicious materials of ecclesiastical history seldom enable us to dispel the dark cloud that hangs over the first age of the church" (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Chapter 15). The truth was obscured by error!

Historian Jesse Lyman Hurlbut gives us even more details in his book *The Story of the Christian Church*, page 41: "For 50 years after Paul's life a curtain hangs over the church through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about A.D. 120, with the writings of the earliest church fathers, we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of Peter and Paul."

### **Where Is the True Church?**

Historians lost sight of the true Church. But it has continued to exist from the time of Christ until the present. Few know where to look for it. For more information, see our Bible Fund page [Just What Is the Church?](#) It will provide more details on this subject.

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