

From Where Did All These Churches Come?

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Worship

Introduction:

In **Ephesians 1:22-23**, Paul explained that Christ has all authority in His church - His body. Further, in **Ephesians 4:4**, Paul claimed there is only one body. As there is only one true Lord, one true Father, one true Spirit, one true faith, there is only one true church. Yet, I own a 22 year old book entitled **Handbook of Denominations**. The table of contents alone is 11 pages long, listing 239 different kinds of "Christian" churches. How did we go from one body beginning on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2** to this present day division? This lesson is divided into three parts. First, we will note what the Bible says about unity. Second, we will overview history to see what happened over the past 2000 years. Third, we will look at where the Franklin Church of Christ fits in, noting what we are and what we intend to be.

Discussion:

- I. What do the scriptures teach us about unity?
 - A. As we consider all of these modern churches, we note a contrast in two important passages.
 1. **Matthew 15:9** says that anyone who teaches man made doctrines worships in vain. Certainly, in a world with hundreds of different kinds of churches all teaching different things, we can assume that some of them are teaching man made doctrines.
 2. **Matthew 7:13-23** teaches that we can only enter heaven by doing God's will. Take note that the people mentioned in **vss. 21-23** were sincerely religious. But Jesus asked for obedience, not sincere religion. A common defense made by divided "Christianity" is that we are taking different ways to get to the same place. However, **vss. 13-14** said there is only one narrow way leading to life. However, the way leading to destruction is broad. We can walk down the left side, the right side or the middle of that way. We can zigzag around and wander as much as we want on that way. If we are all going to the same place, but taking different ways, where are we really going?
 - B. Further, note what God wanted for those who would believe in Him.
 1. According to **John 17:20-21**, Jesus prayed that everyone who believed on Him through the word of the apostles would be one – as the Father and the Son are one.
 2. According to **Matthew 16:18**, Jesus was going to build His church. How many? One. This verse explains why we at the Franklin Church of Christ have decided to be called a church of Christ. We are not a part of a denomination called "Church of Christ." We are a congregation which belongs to Christ.
 3. According to **I Corinthians 1:10-13**, God does not want any divisions among us, but wants us to be of one mind and one teaching. He wants us to be united.
 - C. However, while God wanted unity, He knew there would be division.
 1. According to **I Corinthians 11:18-19**, Paul had heard of divisions within the Corinthian church. He was not shocked, knowing they must come demonstrating who was approved.
 2. Consider the situation in Corinth. New people were constantly being added. Eventually, some would not be willing to abide in the doctrine of Christ. At some point, this would result in division. The division itself would make it easier to compare the churches to God's word and determine which congregation was doing God's will and which one was not.
- II. A look at history. Please, keep in mind this is an overview not an exhaustive historical discourse.
 - A. Christ's church was established on the Day of Pentecost, around **30 AD (Acts 2:47)**. Christians faced repeated persecutions, which had a tendency to drive the insincere and uncommitted out, keeping the church pure and faithful.
 - B. However, under the emperor Constantine, Christianity was legalized. Constantine, in order to fight what he believed was heresy, committed a grave error. In **325 AD**, he invited representatives from churches all over the empire to meet in a city named Nicea to write a short statement of belief. This statement is known as the **Nicene Creed**. The problem is not so much that they wrote what they believed, but that this document was sent out to the churches as the litmus test for faithfulness. It became a manual to define who was really doing God's will. But, God had already given that manual. He gave the Bible.

- C. Further in **381 AD**, Christianity was elevated to the official religion of the Roman Empire. People became Christians not to serve Christ, but to have good social standing. Within one century, Christianity moved from being the persecuted few, devoted to serving God according to His word, to the religious majority, separated from God's word and devoted to serving themselves. However, I am certain that even in the midst of this apostasy, there were still a few who maintained faithfulness to God's word.
- D. In **588 AD**, the church in Constantinople named their bishop the Universal Father of the Church or Pope. The church in Rome, however, did not approve. Yet, instead of simply denying that such a thing should be done, they eventually made the same claim for their bishop, Boniface III, in **606 AD**. This began a rift between the mainstream congregations worldwide that eventually ended in full blown division in **1054 AD**. Churches all over the known world lined up behind whichever "Mother church" they wanted, no longer viewing each other as part of the true church. Those who lined up behind the Constantinople church formed the **Eastern Orthodox** or **Greek Orthodox Church**. Those who lined up behind the Roman church formed the **Roman Catholic Church**. Both institutions continue to exist today.
- E. We need to notice some of the things that occurred doctrinally throughout the first 1500 years of "Christian" history. During the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Augustine of Hippo, made the false doctrine of "Original Sin" popular, claiming that Adam's sin tainted all of us despite the fact that **Ezekiel 18:20** said the son will not bear guilt from the father's sins. However, error did not stop here, it snowballed. After all, this doctrine would claim babies who died, being born sinners, would go to hell. Nobody wants this – therefore infant baptism came on the scene. Yet biblically, we do not find one solitary infant baptized. Of course, no one wants to dunk an infant under the water so this, along with supposed deathbed conversions, produced further error of sprinkling and pouring, even though the Bible always presented baptism as immersion.
- F. We can see that false doctrine begets more false doctrine. As "little white lies" snowball into huge hideous lies, so do minor changes in teaching. Another such doctrine was the manmade teaching of purgatory. Purgatory, though not mentioned in the Bible, was actually the outcropping of the false teaching of mortal and venial sins. Supposedly, mortal sins cannot be paid for by men, Jesus died for those sins. Venial sins, however, can be paid for by man. Jesus did not die for these sins. Rather, we must go to purgatory to pay for them. Once we have fully paid for them through years of torment, then we go to Heaven. But who among us would want to go to purgatory? The doctrines of doing penance and indulgences to avoid Purgatory were developed. Of course, the number one way of gaining indulgences was to pay for them. Through giving money to the church, you would pay for your venial sins, avoid Purgatory and go straight to Heaven when you died. Further, you could even pay so that your favorite dead great-aunt Susie could leave Purgatory and go to Heaven immediately.
- G. A Catholic monk in the early 1500's had a problem with the doctrines of Purgatory and Indulgences, among other things. In 1517, he posted 95 theses on the door of the church building in Whittenburg, Germany, challenging anyone and everyone to a debate. This monk was eventually excommunicated from the Catholic Church. However, he did not allow that to stop him, he simply gathered his own group of disciples and wrote his own confession of faith entitled the **Augsburg Confession** in **1530 AD**. This man was Martin Luther (not to be confused with Martin Luther King, Jr. of the 1960's). His new group became known as the **Lutheran Church**. Luther also wrote his own catechisms – **Luther's Large Catechism** and **Luther's Small Catechism**. These events marked the beginning of the **Protestant Reformation**.
- H. King Henry VIII did not like the fact that so much money from his English subjects should go to the Pope in Rome. When the Pope refused to grant an annulment for his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Henry instigated a separation from the Catholic Church. He began the **Church of England** and in **1534 AD**, the first articles of religion were written. The American branch of this church is the **Episcopal Church** and follows a book entitled **Common Prayer**.
- I. In Switzerland, a man named John Calvin wanted to reform the church back to the principles of his theological predecessor Augustine of Hippo. In **1536 AD**, he wrote his **Institutes of the Christian Religion**, which governed his disciples. The church he formed became known as the **Presbyterian Church**. It is now governed by the **Westminster Confession of Faith**.

- J. In the 1500's and early 1600's a movement formed that believed only adults were proper candidates for baptism. As such, if people entered this church they had to be re-baptized. The Latin term for "again" is "ana." Therefore, this group was called the **Anabaptists** or **Rebaptists**. Under the leadership of John Smythe, this group became creedalized in **1610 AD** when they signed the Short Confession of Faith. Eventually, the "Re" and "Ana" were dropped, leaving the name we know today – the **Baptist Church**. Today, the main group of the Baptist churches follows the **Baptist Faith and Message Statement** or **The Baptist Manual**.
- K. In England, the reform continued for another generation when two brothers, John and Charles Wesley wanted to bring spiritual life back into the church. Their work began in about **1739 AD**. They claimed that there were better methods to worship and spirituality. It is no wonder that the church they eventually formed became known as the **Methodist Church**. Today, this church follows the **Methodist Discipline**.
- L. Many more divisions occurred. As new people come on the scene and want to propagate their own ideas, they do what all have done before them – start a new church. Even the churches we have discussed have divided again and again. According to the **Handbook of Denominations** there are at least 19 different kinds of Methodist churches, not to mention the fact that modern Pentecostal churches have their roots in the Methodist church. 28 kinds of Baptist churches. 10 kinds of Presbyterians. 3 kinds of Anglican or Episcopal churches. 10 kinds of Lutherans. There are 14 kinds of Eastern churches. There are about 7 kinds of Catholic churches. This does not include the independent groups and new groups that have divided off of these churches and claimed new revelation. But you get the picture.
- III. How does the Franklin Church of Christ fit within this history?
- A. In the 1800's, some American men began to look at the divided condition of "Christianity" and at the Bible. They saw in the division the same situation condemned in **I Corinthians 1:11-13**.
- B. These men recognized two correlated problems – the different names and different books used in religion. While some will try to claim the names do not matter, call a Catholic a Baptist, or vice versa and see how much they do matter. They define and distinguish who we are. Further, God has given the Bible, why does He need us to write manuals? After all, if we follow the **Methodist Discipline**, will that make us a **Presbyterian**? Of course not. It will make us a **Methodist**. But what if we just followed the Bible? What would that make us? If we could simply unite based on God's message in the Bible, we could be just what the people were in the Bible – Christians.
- C. Go back to **Acts 2**. On that day, how many people became Roman Catholics? ...Eastern Orthodox? ...Anglican? ...Presbyterian? ...Lutheran? ...Baptist? None, for none of these churches existed. The people on Pentecost became disciples of Christ. They were first called Christians in Antioch. They were part of Christ's church and that is all. We also can do that. But we can only do that by going back to the Bible.
- D. We want to just get back to the Bible. This would be done in four major areas.
1. We should get back to the Bible in **name**. Why not just call ourselves whatever names God used in the Bible, whether speaking of individual Christians or congregations?
 2. We should get back to the Bible in **organization**. How should each congregation be organized? How will different congregations relate to one another? If we just do it the way they did in the Bible, then we will be what they were.
 3. We should get back to the Bible in **worship**. That is what this is all about – honoring and praising God. If we worship the way they did in the Bible, we will be doing what God wants.
 4. We should get back to the Bible for **the plan of salvation**. If we want to be saved as those people in the Bible were, it stands to reason we ought to do what they did. If we just go back to their pattern, we will be alright.

Conclusion:

That is exactly what we are about at the Franklin Church of Christ. Though we appreciate their courage to break with their religious and family traditions, we do not follow the Americans who took up this cry for Bible-based unity nor do we follow anything they wrote. Rather we follow Christ and Christ alone, using His Word alone. We believe we can do just what the early Christians did and be just what they were. We want to invite people to be united with Christ. It is just that simple.