

## HUGH'S NEWS & VIEWS



### WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE THE CHURCH FOR A DENOMINATION?

Prior to the mid-20th century seldom did one hear of a member of the church of Christ leaving the church to join a denomination. There were, of course, exceptions because throughout the history of the church there have been defections from the “one faith” (Ephesians 4:5). Still, it was a rare thing for one to leave the church for a denomination.

Generally speaking, before the 1960s, members of the church were well taught and grounded in the truth of there being only one church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4). Children growing up in Christian homes and attending strong Bible preaching congregations were taught the oneness of the church.

Sadly, however, many of those who were taught the truth about the undenominational nature of the church did not grasp the concept. And many of them never dedicated themselves to a thorough, personal study of what the Bible says about the church. They gave “lip service” to the concept of the “one true church,” but in their hearts they doubted if such was really the case. After all, they had friends who believed in God, believed in Christ, who went to church every Sunday with their families at some denomination, and who lived good, moral lives. How could they not be considered Christians? How could they not be among the saved?

An in-depth study of the church as revealed in the New Testament will reveal the following truths:

1. In New Testament times there was a distinct body of people known as the church. The church was established by Christ Himself (Matthew 16:18), had Christ as its foundation (Matthew 16:18; I Corinthians 3:11), and had Christ as its head (Colossians 1:18). The church is the spiritual body of Christ and Christ only has one body (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4). In the New Testament congregations of saved people constituted “the churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16).

2. In New Testament times all saved people (and only those who had been saved from their past sins) were “added to the church” (Acts 2:47). To be saved and added to the church required a particular course of action—faith in Christ (John 8:24), repentance of sins (Acts 3:19), and baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). Baptism was always immersion—never sprinkling or pouring (Acts 8:38; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). Baptism put one into Christ (Galatians 3:26-27), and until one was baptized “into” Christ that person was still “out of” Christ. Only when a person was baptized upon a penitent confession of faith in Christ as the Son of God was that person saved and added to the church. Nothing short of these acts resulted in forgiveness of sins and membership in the church.

3. Many people in New Testament times were influenced by the teaching of Christ, were exposed to the gospel of Christ, and in some cases were “close” to being Christians (Acts 26:28). Cornelius was “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2). Nevertheless, he was not a saved man, a member of the church. He was instructed to send for the apostle Peter “who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved” (Acts 11:14). Peter came to the household of Cornelius, preached Christ to them (Acts 10:34-47), and “commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48).

The treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia was a religious man, had been to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning home reading the prophet Isaiah. But he was confused religiously and needed help in understanding the Scriptures. Philip “preached Jesus to him” and the man consummated his faith in Christ by being baptized (Acts 8:26-39).

Thus, being a good moral person does not make one a saved person, a member of the New Testament church. Being religious and attending religious services do not make one a Christian, a member of the church. Many in our day are indeed good moral people but they have not been saved and added to the church. Many in our day, like the people of Athens, are “very religious” (Acts 17:22), but this does not mean that their religion is right. Many people have come under the influence of Christ, but it is not enough just to have been “influenced” by Christ; one must actually be “in” Christ in order to be saved and added to the church. The only way to enter Christ is by being “baptized into Christ” (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-4).

4. The church of Christ came into being on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem as we read in Acts 2. All denominations originated with men many years after the close of the New Testament. Being a member of a denomination is not to be equated with being a member of the New

Testament church. One may comply with the conditions for “joining” a denomination without ever doing what the Lord teaches one must do to be saved and added to His church. All denominations teach some truth, but they also hold to many human traditions. Jesus declared, “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:8-9). When one transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, that person does not have God (II John 9) regardless of how sincere he may be in his beliefs and practices. In such a case he has allowed the wisdom of men to take the place of the wisdom of God (I Corinthians 1:19-21).

Following are a few of many things not found in the New Testament that are nevertheless believed and practiced in human denominations (churches originating with men):

- \* A Pope as the earthly head of the church;
- \* A distinction between “clergy” and “laity”;
- \* A single “pastor” leading a church (Note: In the New Testament a pastor was an elder. Congregations always had a plurality of elders/ pastors—never a single pastor);
- \* Designation of ministers as “reverend”;
- \* Women serving as elders and/or preachers;
- \* Infant baptism;
- \* Sprinkling or pouring as substitutes for immersion;
- \* Instrumental music in Christian worship;
- \* Monthly or quarterly observance of the Lord’s Supper as opposed to the New Testament practice of observing the Lord’s Supper *every* first day of the week (Acts 20:7);
- \* Financing the work of the church through bake sales, garage sales, car washes, and bingo games;
- \* Salvation by faith only;
- \* Saved by saying “the sinner’s prayer”;
- \* Once saved, always saved.

When a person has a Biblical understanding of the New Testament church and its undenominational nature, it is utterly astounding to think that one could leave the church and join a denomination with its multiplicity of human traditions, false doctrines, and erroneous practices. Obviously, such a person

never had the right concept of the church to begin with or else he/she reached the point where scriptural doctrine and practice no longer mattered. Instead, a “feel good” atmosphere, and/or a “meet my needs” mentality came to dominate the person’s thinking and they left the body of Christ for a denomination of man. How sad...how unutterably sad.

**(Note: The above article is an abridged edition of an article I wrote and that was published in the August 2016 issue of the *Gospel Advocate*. It is used here by permission of the GA. Next week: "Why Do People Leave A Denomination For The Church?")**

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