

## RESTORING THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH (2)

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Churches of Christ around the world plead for the restoration of original Christianity. To do that the churches must rely upon the original blueprint, the New Testament of Jesus Christ. Although all of us are accustomed to religious division that we see all around us, stop and ask yourself: “Is this really God’s plan for His people?” Did Jesus die in order to bring about this confusion that exists among those who claim to wear his name?

Hello I’m Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Good morning and welcome to this program.

The goal of churches of Christ is restoration of the New Testament church. In order to achieve this reconstruction, Christians must go beyond the sects and denominations which have evolved over the centuries. Original Christianity is found in the New Testament, not in the history of intervening centuries. That’s right. The faith, worship, and practice of New Testament Christians were not always correct, but the New Testament writers attempted to correct them. This information is valuable to us so that we do not believe and practice the same errors.

One of the errors that the early Christians committed was division among themselves. That’s right. Division among followers of Christ is Satan’s most effective tool to maintain unbelief in the world. In Gethsemane, the night when he was betrayed by Judas, Jesus prayed to his Father about the unity of believers.

All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me that they may be one, even as we are one. <sup>12</sup> While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup> But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> I do not

ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. <sup>20</sup> "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:10-21 (ESV).)

Let's notice some of Jesus' sayings in this prayer. Please keep in mind that Satan fights against Jesus' desires as expressed in this prayer. For instance, Satan does not want Jesus and His father to be glorified! If Christ wants his people to be ONE, then Satan wants them to be divided! If Jesus wants his followers to be saved, then Satan wants them to be lost. If Jesus wants them to be protected from the evil one, then the evil one wants to ensnare the Christians and take them captive to do the will of the evil one! If Jesus wants his people to be kept in the name that the Father gave him, then Satan wants these people to be divided up into a multitude of names. (By the way, the name God gave Jesus is Jesus' title, "Christ". Jesus' people should be known by the name of "Christian.") If Jesus wants his people to be sanctified by the truth, then Satan wants them to be unsanctified by lies. (The word "sanctified" means that the Christians would be distinctive, set apart from the world of sinful living. And the thing that sets them apart is the Truth of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes unto the Father except by me." (John 14:6.) Jesus told the Roman governor Pilate, **I have come into the world— to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.**" <sup>38</sup> Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38 (ESV).) And that is Satan's question. Satan wants us to be confused as to what is Truth. Jesus wants us to be sanctified by the truth that He has brought into the world. We find this truth in the pages of the New Testament of Jesus Christ.) If Jesus wants the world to believe on Him and His Father, then Satan wants the world to disbelieve the claims of Jesus. Satan wants a world of atheists.

Now friends, if Jesus thought these thoughts, and prayed this prayer about the unity of his followers, what must we think? Should we promote division? Should we like division? “You go your way and I’ll go mine.” Shouldn’t we work to walk together? Shouldn’t we desire the same thing that Jesus desired? Shouldn’t we work for that unity that Jesus wanted in his followers?

The church Jesus established was exactly what the head of the church wanted it to be. But through the centuries, even beginning in the first century, there were men who wanted to change the church. Men have attempted to “improve” or modernize the church. They succeeded only in corrupting it. In the book of Revelation, through the apostle John, Jesus sent seven messages to the seven churches in Asia. To Sardis Jesus said this: " 'I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.' " (Rev 3:1-2 (ESV).) This church had a reputation of being alive. Well, who thought they were alive? Maybe the community thought they were alive. Maybe Christians in other towns thought they were alive. You see, in the eyes of men the church looked modern. It looked just exactly what men thought the church should be. But Jesus’ judgment was completely opposite. “You are dead,” he said. That which was about to die in that church was exactly what needed to be kept alive. “Wake up,” Jesus said, “strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.” What an indictment!

Friends, the church may look good to the community, or to other Christians, but the Head of the church looks at things differently. Jesus looks at things as they New Testament? Shouldn’t we be interested in knowing what the churches work looks like “in the sight of God”?

In restoring the church of the New Testament, we would not seek to be the church in Sardis! We would not seek to be like the church at Corinth, Jerusalem, or Laodicea. But what we would do is seek out Christ’s plan for those churches, what Jesus wanted those churches to improve upon. Each of the churches I just named had some problems. Many of the things written in the New Testament

were written because there were problems to be confronted with the truth. Every congregation then as now was made up of human beings. While the design and blueprint of Christianity was conceived in heaven, the disciples that constitute a congregation of the Lord church are always human, and prone to sin. That's right! Satan is always looking for a way to cause us to stumble. The more we resist Satan, the more he works to bring us down. As a consequence of our humanness, every congregation reflects that human weakness in imperfections. Therefore, some churches are better than others. That is, some churches practice their worship and carry on the work of the church in a better way than others. There are good churches, average churches, and poor churches, depending upon their success in living up to the Lord's standards. All Christians should dedicate ourselves to following the New Testament of Jesus Christ in all matters of faith, worship, and daily living, then we will be the same kind of Christians as were the faithful of the first century.

Christians should be trying to promote unity instead of sectarianism and division. Surely, the unity of believers is a worthy goal that would be honored by our Lord. How shall we achieve this? Is it possible? Modern churches have attempted to produce unity by merging denominations. They merge their creeds; they merge their manuals of faith into one. They move their headquarters to a central location. They merge into one denominational name and all their churches put the same kind of sign out front. Is this what the Lord envisioned?

Jesus is the head of a universal church that belongs to him. He has a universal book as the only rule of faith and practice. Jesus has only one confession of faith, and that confession is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world. Jesus has a universal name by which his followers are called, the name "Christian." There is but one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father over all. (Ephesians 4:1-6.)

Are you a member of the church of Jesus Christ? Do you seek the church's unity?