

RITUALISM

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Have you seen any hostility between churches? Oh, it's an ugly thing to behold. Many believers in Christ are crossways of each other. Most of the division stems from the teaching and preaching that is done. One group of believers teaches one thing; another group of believers teach the opposite. The division among followers of Jesus Christ is enough to cause some people to reject Jesus as the Savior of the world. All of this division is contrary to the desire of the Christ. Do you contribute to the division or do you stand for unity? Do you divide; or do you unite?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Good morning and thank you for listening.

One of the big areas in which believers in Christ are divided is in ritualism. The word "ritualism" is defined as "the observance of, or insistence upon, ritual." (Webster). Webster defines "ritual" as "a solemn, ceremonial act or observance in accordance with a prescribed rule, as in a religion." Notice the elements that make up the nature of a ritual. There is a solemn act or observance. A "solemn act" is an action that is set aside and done the same way each time. Usually this solemn action is considered sacred, or holy. A second element that makes up the nature of a ritual act is found in the words "prescribed rule." This "solemn action" follows a written rule.

Where are rituals practiced? Ritual acts are found in worship services. You see these solemn acts over and over again in worship services.

Well, followers of Christ are divided as to what acts of worship should be found in a Christian worship assembly. We are also divided by where we should look for the prescribed rules for solemn actions in worship? Most all denominations have written their prescribed rules in official Manuals of Faith written by men and women of the denomination. These Manuals describe what the denomination believes and practices in daily life and in worship services. These Manuals keep every church uniform in their rituals.

Churches of Christ reject these rules. Churches of Christ practice solemn acts in their worship assemblies, but the prescribed rules for those actions are found in the New Testament, not in man-made written manuals.

Believers in Christ are divided by ritualism. Groups of believers cannot join in a worship assembly because of what is practiced in the worship assembly. What "rules" does the worship service follow? Whose ritual will be practiced? You see, this is the basic, fundamental reason why believers from different churches cannot get together in worship of the one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul wrote to some quarreling, divided believers when he wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians. **Paul wrote**, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13 ESV.) Obviously, the apostle Paul knew that Jesus wanted unity among His followers. The night before His crucifixion Jesus prayed for his apostles, but also he said, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 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 17:20, 21 ESV.)

Friends, is ritual standing in the way of keeping Jesus' prayer and the apostle Paul's command from being fulfilled? Is ritual standing between believers in Christ?

Worship assemblies should be the one place in the world where the unity of believers can be seen. But this is not the case. Many churches are practicing ancient rituals that were prescribed centuries ago. They are following to the letter something written after the New Testament was written. Friends, if our rituals are not as old as the New Testament, they are not old enough. The reason that the followers of Christ are divided over worship rituals is because they are getting their rules from different sources. When will we really believe that the

only thing that God has inspired is the Bible? God did not write or have written the Manuals of worship that divide believers.

Since the coming of Jesus Christ, God has inspired the production of only one book. That book is the New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." (Hebrews 1:1, 2 ESV.)

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17 ESV.) Friends, here is the source for the rules of ritual. With the word of God the people of God can be taught, corrected, and trained in righteousness. We can be competent and equipped for every good work. When it comes to the worship of God, who else can instruct us so well as to what God desires than those men inspired to write the NT? Jesus told Satan that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4 ESV.) Do we really believe that we should follow the rules of men in a worship assembly?

The first century Corinthian believers had worship assemblies in which division was evident. "...In the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For...when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat." (1 Corinthians 11:17-20 ESV.) Whereas Paul commended the Corinthians in that they followed his teaching on some things, but in regards to the Lord's Supper, the Corinthians had it wrong. They were NOT following the apostle's teaching. And so, Paul began to instruct them again about the Lord's Supper in verse 23. "...I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-29 ESV.)

Friends, in some way the Lord’s Supper was passed to all the Christians. Each Christian was warned to partake of it as the Lord’s body and blood. The bread stood for the Lord’s body. The contents of the cup stood for the blood of Christ. They were to partake of these elements in a worthy manner. Notice that the Supper was not reserved for a special class of people, such as clergy. The Supper was for every Christian, male or female, slave or free, rich or poor. The person who ate of the Supper without discerning the body was eating and drinking and bringing judgment upon himself. The Lord is the Judge of such matters. This is the reason a non-Christian should be taught and warned about eating the Supper. In eating, people must know what they are doing, or it will become a judgment upon them by the Lord.

Furthermore, please notice, there were no rules as to who would preside over the distribution of the Supper. Later in this epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle commanded the Christians to so arrange a worship service that all things “should be done decently and in order.” (1 Corinthians 14:40 ESV.) In other words, confusion should be avoided.

Someone might ask, “Why do churches of Christ partake of the Lord’s Supper every Sunday when 1 Corinthians 11 does not set a time for the observance of the Supper?” This is a fair question. Why partake of the Supper every Lord’s Day? Churches of Christ contend that the Lord’s Supper should be the primary purpose of our assemblies on the Lord’s Day. If the Lord’s Supper is not presented, then that purpose for coming is not present. In Acts 20:7 we have the example of the church in Troas, on the western coast of modern-day Turkey. The verse says, “And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them....” (Acts 20:7 KJV.) The text shows us that Paul had arrived in Troas on Monday; he had been in town all week long; the disciples, however, came together to break bread upon the first day of the week. The text clearly shows that those disciples came together, not to hear Paul preach, but to “break bread”, a reference to the Lord’s Supper. Since Paul was in the assembly, he took the occasion to preach to them. Churches of Christ follow the example of those Christians. Since no scriptural objection was raised about their meeting

together for that purpose, we must assume that their example of meeting together to commune with Jesus was approved by God. Don't you think the rules we follow in worship assemblies should be rooted in the New Testament of Jesus Christ? Paul said, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." "In the name of the Lord Jesus" means by the authority of Jesus. Is your ritual rooted in the authority of Jesus?