

# One Faith

Lesson 1:

Why Are There So Many Different Churches Today?



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

## One Faith

### Lesson 1: Why Are There So Many Different Churches Today?

Learn why there is so much religious division today and recognize that God is not the cause of it

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#### Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

**Study Number:** DGW33

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**About the author:** My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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**My plea:** It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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# Lesson 1: Why Are There So Many Different Churches Today?

We live in a world where there is much religious diversity – even within “Christianity.” Take a moment to consider some of the different “Christian” churches that are present today: Catholic Church, Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church, Lutheran Church, Baptist Church, Methodist Church, Pentecostal Church, etc. In addition to these are many other denominations and religious organizations that exist (including many so-called “non-denominational” groups).

As you observe the tremendous amount of religious division in the world, perhaps you have developed the same questions that I have had. Questions like: Are all churches equally acceptable to God? Where did all of these churches come from? Does it matter what I believe and practice in the name of religion? Am I in the right church? Is it possible for us to all believe and practice the same thing as the Christians in the New Testament believed and practiced?

These are the sorts of questions that we are left to wrestle with as a result of the religious diversity that exists in the world. Now, it is commonly believed that religious diversity is a good thing – as everyone can express his/her religion and faith in the way that best suits each individual. But, please understand that we are *not* studying about the freedom to practice our faiths in whatever ways we desire; we are talking about what is pleasing to God!

As we search the Scriptures during this Bible study series, we are going to be evaluating the state of this religious diversity by what the Scriptures teach (since the Scriptures must be our only guide). And, we are going to be considering five questions that will help us determine whether God approves of this religious diversity or not. Consider these five questions for just a moment: (1) Why are there so many different churches today? (2) Can everyone be right? (3) Is it possible to be religious and still be wrong? (4) How can you know who is right? (5) Are you interested in New Testament Christianity?

Now, as we begin to consider this series of lessons together, please notice carefully what Paul says in Ephesians 4:5. He states that there is “one faith.” This small phrase contains great implications for religious diversity. So, let us consider the fact that there is only “one faith” – and seek to be part of that faith which is pleasing to God!

In this first lesson, I want to consider the question, “Why Are There So Many Different Churches Today?” Is God the reason that there are thousands of different churches all claiming to follow Jesus Christ? Or, is there some other reason(s)? Does God’s word help us to understand why there are so many different churches today? Where did all of these churches come from? I hope that this lesson will help you answer these questions.

## ***Did God Create Religious Diversity?***

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In order for God to be pleased with all of the thousands of different religious organizations that are claiming to follow Him, He would need to be the

origin of them. You may recall that Jesus said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted” (Matthew 15:13). So, if God did not charter the existence of each one of these different religious organizations, then they cannot have His approval!

## **Ephesians 4:1-6**

Please take a moment to read this text. In it, Paul says, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

The oneness of Ephesians 4:4-6 is meant to be something which unites the followers of Christ and Ephesians 4:1-3 instructs and encourages unity. It also recognizes individual responsibility to unity. God, by implication, provided us with a plan in which we could be united – not divided!

Think about it! Do we serve a God who desires for us to be divided? Is all of the religious division in the world God’s fault? The Scriptures teach us that God is *not* the author/source of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). God simply does *not* desire for us to be divided! The religious division, therefore, is *not* the result of God; but, the result of men/women throughout history! In fact, God has intended and instructed us to be united in “one faith” and has given us things we can be united in! These things are identified in Ephesians 4:4-6. Let’s observe.

### **One God**

There is only one God who is to be recognized as “Father of all who is over all and through all and in you all.” He did not create a system in which there would be many gods who were battling for supremacy. Furthermore, the attributes of God are clearly known through study of the Scriptures (and observation from nature) so that we

can all be united in the one true and living God of the universe!

### **One Lord**

There is only one Lord. Jesus Christ is the Christian’s only Master (at least He should be – Matthew 6:24!). However, problems arise whenever men profess Christ as Lord but do not really accept Him as Lord (Matthew 7:21-23). We must profess, accept, and obey Him as Lord, for there is only one Lord who has purchased His church with His own blood!

### **One Spirit**

There is only one Spirit. Our Lord promised to send the Helper. The Helper is identified as being the “Spirit of truth” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit came to guide men into all truth (John 16:13). Thus, through the Spirit, who inspired the apostles and prophets to write the Scriptures, we have the completed revelation from God to mankind (the word of God, the Bible) – see Ephesians 3:3-5; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21. Furthermore, this revelation is perfect and contains no contradictions (James 1:25)!

### **One hope**

There is only one hope. We have been called by the one Spirit of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:14) to partake in this one hope. This calling has resulted in the same unified hope of salvation that has been given to all who are obedient to the gospel! This is the hope of eternal life in Heaven (1 Peter 1:3-9)!

### **One faith**

There is only one faith. When used in this way, the word “faith” refers to the system of religious belief, teaching, and practice that is acceptable to God. Consider the fact that the “faith” is something that could be obeyed (in Acts 6:7). Philippians 1:27 says that “the faith” is of “the gospel.” Then, Jude 1:3 states that “the faith” is something which could be earnestly contended for – and something which was “once for all delivered to the saints.” Therefore, the term “one faith” refers to the system of religious belief, teaching, and practice that is contained within

the gospel, which God requires that we obey and earnestly contend for! Now, the fact that there is only “one faith” means that there are *not* many different systems of religious belief, teaching, and practice that are acceptable to God (i.e. Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, etc.). There is only one gospel that instructs us concerning the way of salvation (Galatians 1:6-9) and any changes that are made to the gospel’s message (which outlines the faith) are *not* acceptable to God (Revelation 22:18-19)!

### **One baptism**

There is only one baptism. The Scriptures are clear in teaching the necessity of baptism for salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; others). The Scriptures are also clear in teaching that this one baptism is only properly administered by immersion in water (Romans 6:3-4; Acts 8:38-39). Therefore, there is only one way for people to enter a relationship with Christ and obtain the forgiveness of their sins – baptism (Galatians 3:26-27).

### **One body**

There is only one body. The body is the church (Colossians 1:18). Therefore, there is only one church! In fact, Jesus only promised to build one church. In Matthew 16:18, He said, “I will build My church.” But, someone might ask, “Aren’t all denominations members of that one body?” Absolutely not! It is simply not possible for all churches to teach different doctrines about God, sin, salvation, the church, Christian living, etc. – and still be part of the same body! Remember: There is only one faith (system of acceptable religion)! The members of this one body are individual *Christians*, not different churches (1 Corinthians 12:27). And, only those who are obedient to the faith are part of this one body of Jesus Christ!

### **God provides a plan that unites, not divides!**

God, in His infinite wisdom and knowledge, could have chosen for each individual to be saved differently and belong to different groups (as there are today). Yet, God realized that this situation would only divide – and He desired for His followers to be

united in “one faith”! Therefore, God has designed a plan and system of religious belief, teaching, and practice that is completely united (as is demonstrated by Ephesians 4:1-6) – and God expects His people to eagerly maintain that unity!

## ***Why Is There Religious Diversity?***

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So, if God is not the origin of this religious diversity that exists in the world today, when did it begin? Where did it come from? And, how does it continue today? Let’s consider these types of questions and evaluate some history of the “one faith” – and how “one faith” has become many faiths.

### **The one church of Jesus Christ**

Throughout the Old Testament, prophecies were made concerning the coming of the Messiah, the gospel, and the kingdom of God. In the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts, we watch as these prophecies are all fulfilled. God sends His only begotten Son (Jesus Christ, the Messiah) into the world to be the ransom sacrifice for sin. Jesus Christ brings about the fulfillment of the Law of Moses (the Old Testament) and establishes His new (and better) covenant (the New Testament, the gospel). Then, those who are obedient to the instructions of the gospel are cleansed from their sins by the blood of Jesus Christ and are added to Christ’s church (see Acts 2:36-47)!

Acts chapter 2 marks a most significant point in human history. Acts 2 records the first time the gospel is preached since coming into effect – and marks the establishment of Christ’s church (God’s kingdom)! Prior to Acts 2, references to Christ’s church/kingdom are always in the future tense, since it was not yet established (see Matthew 16:18; Luke 9:27). Then, from Acts 2 and forward, the church/kingdom is always referred to as being in existence (see Acts 2:41, 47; Colossians 1:13).

There was only one church at this time – and local churches of Christ were established (see Romans 16:16). These local churches had God’s

approval, as they were part of God's plan. Furthermore, God had given instructions concerning how local churches were to be properly organized, concerning the work they were to be doing, and concerning how they were to worship Him acceptably. This was a time of great progress for the gospel and the expansion of Christ's kingdom (church) – as many souls were being brought to the Lord and many local churches of Christ were being established throughout the world!

So, as the church of Christ is established – and local churches of Christ are established in many different communities within the time of the New Testament, God's pattern and desire for His church is clearly observed! If we will simply hold fast to the pattern of sound words that is contained within the New Testament (2 Timothy 1:13), we can be united and simply be part of one church. However, mankind would not be content to hold fast to God's pattern....

### **The New Testament warned of a coming apostasy**

While the New Testament does not authorize the religious diversity that exists in the world today, it does help us to understand why it has come into existence. Even from the time when there was only one church in existence (during New Testament times), an apostasy was being foretold and division was attempting to creep into Christ's church. Concerning such a threat, Jude wrote to some Christians, instructing them to “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 lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:3-4).

The word “apostasy” simply refers to the falling away from the one faith. Thus, religious division results. God knew that people would not remain true to the “one faith” revealed in the gospel. A glance at the history of God's people tells us exactly the same thing. Throughout time (even in the Bible), we can see progressions of people who move away from the way of truth and righteousness. (1) Adam and Eve were not satisfied with God's perfect order and commandment – and violated God's law in

order to establish their own way. (2) Adam's descendants would wonder so far away from God that God sent a flood to destroy them. (3) The Israelites (God's people in the Old Testament) would make frequent departures from God and His laws throughout their history (read the book of Judges to see this happen frequently).

Now, take a moment to consider the warnings in Scripture about a coming apostasy. (1) Acts 20:28-31 foretells about some who would bring error into the Ephesian congregation and draw disciples away from the truth (note that Paul is speaking to the Ephesian elders): “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For 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, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”

(2) 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 says that the Day of the Lord would not come before the “falling away” comes and the man of sin is revealed. Though the “man of sin” in this passage is not specifically identified, his description leads many people to believe that this is a prophecy about the establishment of the Catholic Church or the Pope (who claims to have all authority and be infallible). The passage states: “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

(3) 1 Timothy 4:1-3 records a prophecy that some would depart from the faith. It says, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with

thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”

(4) 2 Timothy 4:1-4 records Paul’s instructions to Timothy to be diligent in preaching the word – and his warning about a time that would come when folks would not “endure sound doctrine,” departing from the faith. It says, “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. 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, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

### **The New Testament identified factors involved in this apostasy**

Having seen that the New Testament foretold an apostasy, let’s consider four contributing factors to this apostasy that are specifically identified in the New Testament.

**(1) False teaching.** There are many warnings given in the New Testament about some who would fail to accurately teach God’s instructions, leading others into error. Please read and consider the following passages carefully. Particularly notice how the one true message of the gospel would be perverted/changed discretely and would be destructive to those who would teach and follow these doctrines.

Galatians 1:6-9: “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

Matthew 7:15-20: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by

their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”

2 Peter 2:1-3: “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.”

**(2) Itching ears.** Though false teaching is a common cause for apostasy – as individuals preach different gospels and follow after the same, straying away from the faith; the Bible also speaks of those who would develop “itching ears.”

2 Timothy 4:3-4 says, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

The picture in this text is one of an individual departing from the way of truth and seeking for someone who would teach a false gospel. Why would someone *desire* a false gospel to be taught? The text says that many will not *endure* sound doctrine (i.e. sound doctrine may require too much of them, they may consider sound doctrine to be too strict, they may not like the teachings and conclusions offered by sound doctrine, etc.). However, these folks may still desire the hope offered by true religion. So, they find someone who will teach them a different gospel with the hope of the true Gospel (which becomes a false hope)! For instance, many will not like what the Bible teaches about marriage, divorce, and remarriage (because of what it requires of them). Therefore, they may find someone who teaches them what they *want* to hear

on the subject. Others may reject the Bible's teaching about the necessity of baptism or the mode of baptism (immersion in water). Rather than accepting the truth, they may turn to a teacher who will tell them what they *want* to hear.

**(3) The traditions of men.** Another factor that contributes to division that is seen in the New Testament is man-made tradition. These are the established ways of man – even his established religious beliefs and practices. And, when these established ways are held above the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the result is more division.

In the period of the New Testament, the most frequent problem along these lines were the traditions involving Judaism. Jesus confronted such error in Matthew 15, when He told the Jewish scribes and Pharisees that they had “made the commandment of God of no effect by their tradition” (vs. 6) and they worshiped God in vain because they taught “as doctrines the commandments of men” (vs. 9). Compare also with Mark 7:8-9.

**(4) Selfish ambitions.** The pursuit of selfish desires above God's desires is also identified in the Scriptures as being a contributor to division. Certainly, any time that an individual puts himself/herself above God (by refusing to submit to God), he/she works to divide the church rather than unite it! While there may be numerous things as the source of these selfish ambitions (i.e. wealth, power, prestige, etc.), it always works contrary to God's ways and His plan. Read and carefully consider the following examples from the New Testament of men who would pursue selfish ambitions.

Acts 20:29-30: “For 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, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”

Romans 16:17-18: “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4: “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

3 John 1:9-11: “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 those who wish to, putting them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.”

## **Apostasy during New Testament times**

Throughout the pages of the New Testament, not only was apostasy foretold and some of its causes identified; but, the Scriptures even record some departures from the faith that had happened within the first century of the church being established. Consider the following.

(1) False teaching concerning circumcision and the keeping of Moses' Law was common (see Acts 15, the book of Galatians, and Colossians 2).

(2) Sin had effectively infiltrated the Corinthian church – including divisions, fornication, corrupting the Lord's Supper, and false teaching about the resurrection (see the book of 1 Corinthians).

(3) A man named Diotrophes had taken authority over a church for himself – and violated the God-approved organizational structure for local churches (see 3 John 1:9-11).

(4) Five of the seven churches in Asia minor were not pleasing to God. The church in Ephesus had left her first love. Some in the church at Pergamos had held to the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. The church in Thyatira had allowed Jezebel to seduce the Lord's servants. The church in Sardis was dead. The church in Laodicea was lukewarm. Read about all of these situations (plus two faithful congregations) in Revelation 2-3.



(5) There were those masquerading as apostles, who really had not been commissioned by Christ in that way – and were deceiving Christians (see the book of 2 Corinthians).

## ***An Overview Of Church History***

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By the end of the New Testament period, significant pieces can be observed which pointed to a great apostasy. Now, this apostasy was *not* going to happen because of some defect with God or with God’s plan. Instead, this apostasy was going to take place and continue because of man’s unwillingness to submit himself entirely to God’s plan!

So, how did we get from one church in Acts 2 to having tens of thousands of different (so-called) “Christian” churches in existence today? Let’s consider an overview of the four periods of “church history.”

### **Progress**

This refers to the New Testament period in which there was unity and the true gospel was being taken throughout the world by the apostles and by all disciples of Christ. During this time, many souls were being added to the Lord’s church and many local churches of Christ were being established throughout the world. At the first, this church was pure. However, as we have seen, it would not take long for a falling away from the faith to take place.

### **Apostasy**

This refers to the period of time as the New Testament period ends and the apostasy we have been discussing begins to develop. Historical records show that the first great apostasy occurred when the organizational structure of the Lord’s church was perverted. One elder in a congregation began to be recognized as having more authority than the other elders (becoming known as the Bishop). Then, that Bishop would later gain authority over other (smaller) churches. Then, the Bishop would gain authority over all congregations within a portion of

the world. Eventually, there were five leading Bishops over all the churches. These Bishops lived in the five capital cities of the world at that time: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople.

Then, as false doctrines were introduced and churches debated the merits of each of these doctrines, the first council of the apostate church was called in the city of Nicea in June of 325, specifically to address an issue regarding the eternal nature of Jesus Christ. With this first council came the writing of the first official creed (the Nicene Creed). Thus, by the year 325, man had now taken authority for himself to establish an official “church creed” other than the Bible!

The apostasy continued through the years and included even more false doctrines introduced, additional church councils being called, and more official “church creeds” being written. In addition, hostility developed between the five leading Bishops of the apostate church (particularly the Bishops in Constantinople and Rome) – as the Bishop of Constantinople (John, the Faster) assumed the title of “Universal Bishop.” After his death, the title “Universal Bishop” was finally settled and given to the Bishop of Rome. This all paved the way and worked to develop the Catholic Church – and a Pope who is said to be the head over the church and free from all error. Years after the development of the Roman Catholic Church (unofficially recognized as beginning in 606 A.D.), a division would occur that would form the basis of what is now known as the Greek Orthodox Church.

### **Reformation**

After years of such digression from the ways of truth, beginning around the 15<sup>th</sup> century, individuals gained prominence in calling the practices of the Catholic church into question. Some of these individuals questioned the authority of the Pope, some questioned other points of doctrine. Regardless of the specific points they questioned, they saw that the Catholic Church had developed into something that was not according to the Scriptures. Therefore, these men attempted to *reform* the Catholic church.

Some of the most prominent figures during this time were Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Ulrich Zwingli, and John and Charles Wesley. While these men had many noble ambitions and ideas that were in accordance with the teachings of Scripture, a study of their beliefs also reveals that they had a number of unscriptural ideas (i.e. faith only for salvation, inherited sin, etc.). As a result of the work of these (and other) men, many “protestant” churches got their beginning. The Lutheran Church began in approximately 1520 A.D. The Presbyterian Church began around 1536 A.D. The Baptist Church began around 1607 A.D. The Methodist Church began in approximately 1739 A.D.

Now, while these churches were beginning at this time in history, they were all still failing to make a complete return to the “one faith” that is outlined in Scriptures. Furthermore, as the number of churches was rapidly expanding in the world, these churches would, themselves, experience division and other churches would form as the result.

## Restoration

Around the conclusion of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were some men who questioned even these reformation-based churches. They were students of the Scriptures and evaluated the religious beliefs and practices of the various churches – and determined to accept no other creed besides the Bible, simply doing all things according to the authority of Scriptures. These men (though they were not always perfect in their efforts) made many noble efforts to restore New Testament Christianity rather than reform the existing churches.

Some of the prominent figures in this movement were Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, James O’Kelley, Elias Smith, and others. However, even though they made great strides toward New Testament Christianity, some would still not make a complete return to simple, New Testament Christianity. Divisions continued to exist – even within this movement, as the Christian Church was established and recognized as a separate church in 1906.

Of course, this is just a very brief overview of some significant points in church history. However,

simply notice that God had only established one church and had given “one faith” for everyone to follow and be part of. Yet, because of man’s unwillingness to hold fast the pattern of sound words (2 Timothy 1:13), they departed from the “one faith” and established thousands of different (so-called) “Christian” churches over time. Today, there are still new churches beginning on a regular basis – and new doctrines and religious practices being introduced! So, the apostasy that we have been studying through this part of the lesson is still ongoing and leading many people astray!

## Conclusion

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I would like to challenge you to take a good look at the religious diversity in the world (or, even in your community) and ask, “Does God approve of *this* – based on what His Word teaches?” It is my hope that this study has helped you to understand that God has *not* designed/authorized the religious division that is present in the world today and that such division is contrary to His plan. In fact, the religious division that exists today is not the plan of God; but, it is the plan of Satan!

Notice the language of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” In John 17:20-23, Jesus prayed for unity among His followers – as He recognized that their unity would impact whether individuals would believe and obey Him or not. Satan also recognizes this – and he has been working throughout the centuries to confuse and mislead religious people!

Now, if you understand that God does not approve of such religious division, then ask, “Which church follows the pattern of the New Testament church?” The remaining four lessons in this study will attempt to help you develop a greater understanding of the “one faith” that is found in the

Scriptures – and contrast this “one faith” with the religious division that is experienced throughout the world today!

What is an apostasy? Did the New Testament warn about a coming apostasy?

## ***Study Questions***

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As you observe the tremendous amount of religious division in the world, what sorts of questions have you had?

The New Testament identifies a number of factors that are involved in this apostasy. Please discuss each of the following.

### **1. Did God Create Religious Diversity?**

How does Ephesians 4:1-6 contribute to unity?

1. False teaching –

2. Itching ears –

3. The traditions of men –

4. Selfish ambitions –

From Ephesians 4:4-6, discuss how the following “ones” should be uniting factors:

Did any apostasy occur during New Testament times? Discuss.

1. One God –

2. One Lord –

3. One Spirit –

4. One hope –

5. One faith –

6. One baptism –

7. One body –

### **3. An Overview Of Church History**

Provide a quick overview of the following periods of church history:

1. Progress –

2. Apostasy –

3. Reformation –

4. Restoration –

### **2. Why Is There Religious Diversity?**

How many churches did God establish? When was it established?

**\*Does God approve of the religious division in the world today**