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**Presentation Transcript**  
**Why So Many Different Types of Christians?**  
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Our presentation today is titled, *Why So Many Different Types of Christians?* And since this issue deals with the nature of the Church of God, it's a good topic for Pentecost, a festival celebrating the anniversary of the church's founding.

Jesus, the night before He died, prayed that God would cause His disciples to be one with He and the Father. Fifty days later, Christ sent the Holy Spirit, imbued 120 disciples with it, and founded the Church of God. We're told that the Holy Spirit is the way Jesus and Father live inside us, and He's already told us that they are one. So we're to be one with them, and consequently, one with each other, as related to them.

So let's think about what has happened in the church since that day. Well, we know the very day. Peter preached a sermon and 3,000 people were converted, so there was a big jump right off the bat. As we look around today, however – jumping forward 2,000-plus years – we see a plethora of Christian denominations, splits, reorganizations. You know, every time you see a church that says, "The reorganized this or that," that means there's been a church split. Right? Somebody wasn't happy with the way the old one was organized, so they *reorganized* it. And there are schisms and cults and off-shoots of all types. So what happened? What happened?

Well, if we dwell on it for just a moment, it seems like chaos and confusion in the face of Jesus' prayer. So how are we to think about all of this? How are we to think about others who also profess to be Christians, yet don't think the same way we do? Is the Church of God in disarray? Are we the only ones who are right, while all the rest have gone astray? If that's true, what do you mean when you say, "We?" Do you know anyone else who believes the Bible exactly the way you do?

So let's consider the situation from the beginning. In Acts 2:42, this is what happened immediately after the Pentecost – original – when God gave the Holy Spirit. It says:

**Acts 2:42-47** – *They – that’s the members – devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belonging and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And we understand from this that they there was a terrible famine going on. It wasn’t the beginning of communism. It was a situation where people were in desperate straits, and so they were sharing what they had among themselves, so they could survive. And day by day, attending the temple together, and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved*

It’s almost millennial, isn’t it? Everybody’s together – one. And it says in Acts 3 – just to add a little bit more to this:

**Acts 3:1-10** – *Now Peter – this is Acts 3:1 – and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a lame man, from birth, was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple, that is called Beautiful Gate, to ask alms of those who entered the temple. So he was there every day. And everybody that went in and came out saw him. And he’d been that way all his life. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have, I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately, his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Quite a rush for the apostles, for the man that was healed, for the brethren, who understood what was going on! Who wouldn’t gravitate to that? And they wouldn’t want to changed anything. They would want to be a part of what was there.*

But then, years later, we see that there was a division in the church over who should be circumcised. From that, it went to this big argument that almost ripped the church apart. And they had a conference about it, and made the decision, by which they all abided. James, the brother of Jesus, gave the consensus to the apostles and division was averted.

But time passed, and we, here and there, hear Paul talking about people like Hemanueus and Alexander, the coppersmith – they resisted Paul, an apostle of God, and tried to take away members to follow them. So that happened.

And then, John, the disciple that Jesus loved, talked about Diotrephes – now this is late in the first era of the church. And he resisted John and John said he was putting the real believers out of the congregation. So he was a complete heretic, who didn't believe the teaching that Jesus brought to the apostles and the apostles brought to the brethren.

And then, of course, there's Jude, who warned the church in the end time – end of the first era – about heretical teaching – not in line with what Jesus taught. Now this Jude fellow, he was probably Jesus' brother. So he's telling us to stick with the faith that was first delivered by Jesus and then witnessed by the apostles.

So it didn't stay unified very long before there were people wanting control and wanting to take others away for their own purposes. I'm sure money was a part of that.

But then, after the eye witnesses of Jesus died or were martyred – you know, the original disciples – the men who knew and heard Jesus – after they died off, what then? Well, we're going to say, "But we still have the Bible. We have the written record of what they said." That's true. But we have a problem there, don't we? In 2 Peter 3:15, let's read something Peter said.

**2 Peter 3:15-16** – *And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother, Paul, wrote to you, according to the wisdom given to him....* I'm going to come back to that. How are we supposed to pay attention to what Paul? According to the wisdom given to him by God. So Peter knew that Paul wisdom given to him by God, and I think he also knew that he did too, but it wasn't the same wisdom that Paul had. Right? A difference. And he says: *...as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.* So he's saying, "We're together on this issue" – counting the patience of our Lord as salvation. *There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.*

So even before all the original apostles were dead, there were people that didn't know how to study the Bible and come up with the same answer everybody else came up with – or didn't want to. So, the point is, that reading the Bible can be tricky business, comparing to sitting and listening to Jesus explain it Himself, or listening to one of the people that heard Jesus explain it Himself. We don't have that anymore.

I'm going to give you a little example in Matthew 19:23.

**Matthew 19:23-26** – *Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. And again, I tell you, it is easier for camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." And when the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, and said, "Well, who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them, and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Now, to us, and to the disciples, it sounds like Jesus was saying, “If you’re rich, you can’t make it.” You know what a needle looks like – and an eye in a needle? And you know what a camel looks like. Right? But He was saying – because we know He explained it – that it’s only *with difficulty* that a rich person can enter in. Now, back then, if you were rich, the social implication was, that you were blessed by God because you were a good person. Also, there was a back door – you know how computer programs have back doors written into them by the programmer, so that they can get in – and the hackers find them and mess everything up – but anyway, there was a gate into the walled and fortified city of Jerusalem called The Needle’s Eye, because it was so small. And you could get a camel through it, but only with great difficulty, because the camel would have to scooch on his belly to get through it. So you *can* get a camel through the eye of a needle! – if that’s what He meant. He didn’t say that’s what He meant, but we know that there *was* a gate and it *was* called The Eye of the Needle – and *everybody* knew about that gate.

So, my point is, much of what we read is colored by what was then contemporary knowledge, customs, folk wisdom, locale. Additionally, Christians, down through the various ages, and from various locations and locales, all have different ways of looking at the same thing in scripture. And then there are those who seek to twist the Bible meaning to suit their own ends. That factors into it, too. So, not even the Bible record causes us all to understand what Jesus said and did in the same unified way today.

Another example: I once asked Victor Kubik how the Sabbatarian Ukrainians survived the Soviet Union. And here’s what he said. He said, “When a young Sabbatarian Ukrainian couple marry, they believe their calling – their marriage – is for the church. When they have children, it’s so that the church can grow and go forward and do His will.” Why do young couples in the United States Church of God have kids? Because they want to. So why the difference? We’re all looking at the same book. Well, I think it’s how the church culture has affected their thinking. We won’t talk about Millennials right now. But, who here knows what a Coptic Christian is? I think they’re primarily in Ethiopia today, are they not? Completely different culturally, locale-wise and language-wise from us. Just because of who they are, they think differently than we do. I think they came from Egypt originally, because Egyptian Christians came out of the Catholic Church very early – or what to be the Catholic Church. I think Egypt was a hotbed for Christianity at one point. So it’s not surprising that they believe in the trinity. We cannot say that they are not sincere, however, because many of them have been martyred by the Muslims in northeast Africa in the last decade. So, did you know that there are Sabbatarian Christians in China, where it’s illegal to be a Christian? You’re persecuted heavily if you’re a Christian of any kind there, let alone a Sabbatarian Christian. And this Sabbatarian Chinese Christian movement is so big that they’re even exporting their Chinese Christianity and Sabbatarianism to the United States now. Now I don’t know a single one of them, nor do I know how to contact any of them, but do you suppose they observe the Sabbath exactly the same way we do? I mean, we don’t even do that here in this room! We all probably do it a little differently from one another.

And again, I'll ask the question, "So what do we mean when we say, "We?" Well, I remember the first time I was confronted with this concept. I was in the Worldwide Church of God – the bastion of *we are one and we are right*. I was talking to a high-ranking minister who had just come from a meeting of higher ups in the church. The meeting had been convened to decide a matter of confusion in the church. And he said to me, "It was amazing to learn that there were as many different opinions about the matter as there were ministers present." And that was in *that* church!

So that gets us to the question, "What did Jesus mean when He said, "One – you are one." Do you think God foresaw all diversity of view that we have now in the church? No, that's not true. He didn't have to foresee it. He's outside of time. He knows everything – past, present and future – because He's outside of time. If you don't believe that, just go read the first two chapters of *A Brief History of Time*, by Stephen Hawking, and he will prove it to you – if you can understand it. I *barely* made it to two chapter 2 with understanding. Chapter 3 was a mystery to me. I confess that. So, He knows everything. He's fully aware of what would happen – from our perspective, what *would* happen. And this happens in all religions, all cultures, all clans, all people, all countries. There are Sunni and Shiite Muslims. There are Ashkenazi Jews that persecute the Sephardic Jews. There are Dallas Cowboy fans who think they follow America's team when the rest of us know they are wrong. It's the nature of the way human beings function. And I'm not saying we do this to be cantankerous, necessarily – though some do – it's just that we – coming from different places and different backgrounds – look at things differently. So we're going to come to different conclusions about things.

Now, is that bad? Well, God created the races. We know that He works, and has worked, through various cultures and languages. He *likes* diversity. Look at the universe. That's just obvious. But, while He likes diversity, He hates division, judging, putting down, self-righteous posturing, thinking oneself or one's clan or one's country is better than somebody else.

Let's ask this? Do you think the enemy figures into all this? I'm sure that he does. You know, I learned something in all this stuff that the Democrats are putting out about the Trump campaign colluding with Russia. But what I learned was apart from Trump. The Russians, I learned, spent 4 million dollars before the election on Facebook and Twitter to influence *us*. What were they trying to do? Get Trump elected, or get Hillary elected? No. They were trying to divide us even more. They were trying to widen the chasm. They were trying to create a bigger gap between the two major schools of thought here. Because they know that division weakens us. So Putin, who, in his own mind probably thinks of himself as the master spy – ex-KGB that he was – really is just a tool for our enemy – the author of confusion. That's how it *always* works.

So, what to do then – when we're divided in the practice of our Christianity? Here's what I think it comes down to now for us – what it's come down to for me – and that is the issue of being one though different. I think it's a matter of focusing on what God clearly tells us to focus on. What is the primary identifier of the true Church of God? Some people think it's the Sabbath and the

holy days, or knowing about the resurrections, or this or that. And, if we think that, that's not what the Bible says. In John 13:34 through 35, Jesus said:

**John 13:34-35** – *A new commandment I give you, that you love one another – just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples – if you have love for one another.*

So it's not the Sabbath. It's not the trinity. It's not any doctrinal distinctive. But it's love for each other. Why is that so important? Well, I think the key to all is just what Jesus said – “just as I have loved you....” So when we signed on to become a disciple of Jesus, we signed on to become *like* Him. And He loves everybody. So Christ loves us. We should love Him, the Father and all His other children. That's what's most important! And that is the identifier of who the Church of God people really are.

You know, if you think about it, there is no more universe. There's not going to be any more sunsets. So, the Sabbath, as we know it, will have served its purpose. But there will still be faith, hope and charity. Now, am I saying that the Sabbath is not important? Not even a little bit! Not even a little bit. And think about this: in Matthew 20, verse 1, Jesus tells this parable. He says:

**Matthew 20:1-2** – *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.”* But then, he went later on, a few hours later, and he got some more people. And then, a few hours later, he got some more, and some more, and through the day, he finally had enough people to get the job done, I guess. But he brought in groups of people at different times during the day. At the end, he gave them the same money! And, of course, the people that worked hardest in the beginning, it says in verse 11:

**V-11** – *“On receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. And it's my money and I get to decide who gets what. You agreed to the deal.’ And he said, ‘Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me, or do you begrudge my generosity?’ So the last will be first and the first last.”*

Now, the question I want to ask you is: Is this really about money? What's the lesson here? Well, it's about what God gives us. When we sign on, He gets to decide what we get. And we get to decide if we will receive what He gives us. Will we value it? Will we use it? Will we compare it with what others have and feel discontented? Will we keep our agreement to love God and all His children and be happy with the gifts we have been given?

Let's suppose that God called you into a church that valued taking care of the poor above all else.

Would you look down on that small group of Sabbatarian-keepers, who don't have a clue about taking care of the poor? It's just not a part of their church history, because they mostly came up in a country nobody really needs to be poor – except, perhaps, people who are disabled or disabled to work in some way? And, at the same time, will you trample all over the day God made for rest?

What if you're one of those Sabbath-keepers? Would you look down on those who don't know about the Sabbath, but may know a lot more about taking care of the poor? I can't speak for anybody else here, but I feel blessed to know about the Sabbath and to have proven it beyond any doubt. The proof was just laid in front of me. It's a gift – just like Peter said about Paul's knowledge – the knowledge that was given to *him* – the wisdom that was given to him. So the Sabbath is a gift. It's a blessing from God. So should I leave it off because God hasn't given it to others – it's not really important? Well, of course not! I *know* it's in the Book. I know that's what God wants us to do. But it's not for me to judge another man's servant and put down other people that don't know that. And they may know more than I do about other things.

So, taking care of the poor is important and so is the Sabbath, and not all in all Christian groups know...some of them don't know either one of those things. But those things are not the most important thing. Love is. In 1 John 4:8, John said:

**1 John 4:8** – *Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

Now, how deeply entwined is that? And then in 4:16, he says:

**V-16** – *So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him – because of the Holy Spirit.*

And James said:

**James 4:16-17** – *As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

So, if I know the Sabbath, I'd better keep it. And, if I know to take care of the poor and don't, I'm in trouble.

Do you know how I learned about what a camel going through the eye of a needle might have meant to Jesus? I learned it from one of my clients. He keeps the Sabbath, but not the same way I do. So, just talking to him enriched me. He knew it. I didn't. So what else do others know about God that I don't? Well, probably a lot! So I'm obligated to hold fast to the truth as I know it, but also to love others who may know other things that I don't.

You may, also recall another statement that I have made often. It enrages some of my former fellows in the ministry when they've heard me say it. I explained once that I learned more about

servant leadership from a Buddhist than I ever did from any minister in my church. So, if we take that approach – that we focus on the most important thing to be unified about – and we’re still okay to have our own doctrinal distinctives.... Now I know that some doctrinal distinctives are not going to be accepted by Christ. And if those persons hold those doctrinal distinctives out of desire to control other people, or for their own glorification, they’re going to have a really hard time at the gate. But, if they hold those distinctives out of good will, and maybe they just don’t know how to study the Bible that well and they got something wrong, we’re not to judge another person’s servant. So we don’t know who’s who in those categories most of the time, so the best thing is just to be nice to everybody, and hang with what we believe.

I met a man one year, at the Winter Family Weekend, who had been a Sabbatarian Christian all his life. I think he was a part of the Church of God International for a long time – and maybe even Church of God Seventh Day – and he went to a Greek Orthodox Theology Seminary. They believe in the trinity. They believe in Sunday. They believe all the kind of mainstream Christianity things. And he said, “I learned a lot, but I did not sell my birthright.”

So we *can* become one with other believers on the most important point of all, even though we have different gifts. And, if we look at the array of doctrinal differences – or different customs – in Christianity, to us it seems like a bewildering confusing mess that’s going to be impossible to sort through. But that’s not our job. And neither does God have to do it. To Him, it’s not a problem. There’s coming a time when He finally is going to gather all those who love Him, and love each other, into His Kingdom. And He’s going to answer *all* our questions, and clear away all the confusion. I believe that’s going to happen in an instant. I believe we’ll be tapped into the mind of God – just the way Jesus is. But whether that’s true or not – an instant, or a month, or a year, or whatever – at that time, we’re all going to share all God’s gifts with Him and with each other. And we’ll know which doctrines *aren’t* gifts at all, but mistakes, and we’ll know exactly what God knows. And when Jesus and the Father first gave the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, I believe they clearly saw the diversity of belief that would develop, and they clearly saw how that would, one day, be cleared away in a heartbeat. What an awesome time that’s going to be!

So, if you want to know more about Pentecost – or the other six biblical festivals – you can go to [liferesource.org](http://liferesource.org) and search on the term *holy days*. We’d love to share with you what’s been shared with us.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families, and the Church of God.