

Lifting Up Jesus

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WHY SO MANY DENOMINATIONS?

In John 17:21 Jesus prayed for unity of his believers. He prayed that we might be one in Him just as He is one with the Father. He prayed that we might be one so that the world may believe that Jesus was sent of God.

But are we one? Why are there so many different denominations within the Christian faith? With so many to choose from, it can be confusing to make a decision about which to belong to. If the church is His body of believers then what has happened to divide it so?

The disciple John wrote the book of Revelation while a prisoner on the island of Patmos. The word revelations means to “reveal” and its’ author is Jesus according to the *first verse* of the book. In this study we will be concentrating on the 6th chapter of Revelation.

READ ENTIRE CHAPTER OF REVELATION 6 FIRST

1. Who opened the 1st seal? Rev. 6:1

Note: Who are the ‘four living creatures’? The word “zoon” according to the original Greek translation means a living being. Some have felt that these were angels.

2. What was the color of the first horse and what did he represent? Rev. 6:2

Note: John, the disciple was living in the first century after the ascension of Jesus. In the time of Christ, when a victorious general came back from a battle he returned on a white horse. It was a sign of victory. White also symbolizes purity. The early church was filled with triumph and purity. It was filled with the spirit and love of Christ and the gospel spread incredibly. This period lasted from about 33AD to 99AD. The 1st seal represents the victorious church.

3. What was the color of the second horse and what did he represent? Rev. 6:3, 4

Note: Satan is enraged. He desires to stop the onward march of God's army. In this next period 100 AD–323 AD is the beginning of persecution by the Roman army. Many Christians were cast to lions while audiences jeered in entertainment. Many were butchered. But the more they were persecuted, the more the church grew. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the gospel. Satan realized that he would have to change his strategy. And so he did ...

4. What was the color of the third horse and what did he represent? Rev. 6:5, 6

Note: Paul predicted in Acts 20:28–31 that there would be a falling away from the truth of God. In this period of corruption and materialism the church is weighed in the balance and found wanting. Satan changes his strategy and introduces distortions of the truth. Pagans only half converted came into the church with their pagan practices. Christian leaders in an attempt to unite the Christian church were willing to make compromises. Major changes took place. The former truth and power of the early church were supplanted by pagan practices that continued to creep into the church during this time period from 323 AD to 538 AD. Images and statues began to surface in churches. Church councils began to take the place of the word of God. In 321 AD a civil law by Constantine the emperor proclaimed that everything be closed on the first day of the week—and 'the venerable day of the sun' be enforced. The first church Sunday law was in place by 325 AD. Eventually man's laws began to replace the laws of God. The 3rd seal represents compromise and corruption.

5. What did Jesus teach about the Ten Commandment laws? Matt. 5:17–19

6. What did Jesus say about those who teach tradition in the church over His commands? Matt. 15:8, 9

7. What was the color of the fourth horse and what did he represent? Rev. 6:7.8

Note: From a powerful, spirit-filled church to a church that is spiritually dead. It has compromised and come to a place where the spirit and power of God is gone. Satan has been effective in diluting the gospel. This period of time is known as the Dark Ages, the period from 538 AD to 1517 AD. This is the time when the pope becomes the emperor of Rome and has incredible power. The word of God is kept from the people and only the Roman church has access to it. Sunday keeping comes into the church in 321 AD, images and relics in 327 AD, finally purgatory and indulgences come in along with the pagan idea of the immortality of the soul and the people have no knowledge of the true gospel of Jesus anymore. Those that defy the teachings of the church were put to death. But God had a plan for his faithful followers, 'His true church'.

8. What is the message of the fifth seal? Rev. 6:9–11

Note: The beginning of the Reformation takes place around 1517 AD. Many faithful people of God rise up with conviction against the hypocrisies and errors in the church at this time and are martyred. John Wycliffe begins to translate the Bible into the language of the people as well as the Waldensians, a group of God fearing people of France who would laboriously hand write and distribute the Bible into the streets dressed as merchants and other non-suspecting individuals. Huss and Jerome, two heroes of the reformation who will only obey what the Bible teaches were later burned at the stake by the Roman church. Later in the century, Martin Luther a priest who found an old Latin Bible, discovered that salvation is not to be paid for by indulgences or in suffering for your sins in penance but by faith in the Son of God. Little by little God was at work restoring the vital truths that had long been shrouded in darkness.

9. What were God’s disciples emphatic about? Acts 5:29

Note: We are naturally bent toward reverencing those who are spiritual leaders rather than God Himself. Martin Luther specifically told his followers not to take his name and make a church out of the truth that God had led him to and camp around those doctrines, but did they listen? NO. Martin Luther believed in infant baptism but in 1650 the truth about full immersion baptism as taught in the scriptures came to light and Roger Williams began a church with that new truth. They later became known as the Baptists. In Proverbs 4:18 God shows us that truth is to be restored like bricks in a foundation one brick at time. If God were to show us all the truth at once it would prove to be too much for us. God restores and teaches as man can handle.

But here’s the PROBLEM. God wants to lead all his children to stand on the shoulders of those reformers and not to reverence their leaders but to keep accepting new light as God leads. Truth is progressive. With Wycliffe, we must believe in the Bible only. With Huss, obedience is to God only. With Luther, salvation is a gift from God not to be earned. With Wesley, salvation results in a higher standard of living. From those men of God come fuller and fuller light but God never intended us to camp there but to continue to embrace new truths as he leads.

10. What is an identifying mark of a ‘true’ church? Isaiah 8:20

Note: Here is one infallible standard by which all teaching, all doctrines, all religions, and all churches must be evaluated. If they are teaching any doctrine contrary to God’s eternal law, the Ten Commandments, Isaiah says, ‘there is no light in them.’

11. What symbolism does Jesus use for His true church? 2 Cor. 11:2

Note: God consistently uses the term woman or virgin or bride as His church. He considers Himself, the Bridegroom and His church, the bride.

12. How is the “virgin/woman”, God’s true church, characterized in Rev. 12:17?

Note: Here we find that God’s true church is identified by the fact that it keeps the commandments of God. All of them including the fourth commandment, which is to honor the Sabbath day, as did His early church.

13. What is the testimony of Jesus Christ? Revelation 19:10

Note: God’s true church will be a church that carefully receives and studies the prophecies of the Bible. It is a church that believes in the Bible only and in following all of the Ten Commandments no matter what the outcome. It is a matter of loyalty to God rather than loyalty to man.

CONCLUSION: We are involved in a spiritual conflict on this planet. Satan is always trying to keep us from receiving truth. He desires to hinder what God wants to accomplish. But God is ultimately in control and He directs what He will allow or not allow. Thankfully, God’s word, the Bible gives us knowledge of God’s will and truth. Will we obey God or man? The choice is ours.¹

¹ Lewis, K. A. (2010). *Lifting up Jesus: Bible Study Lessons*. Walla Walla, WA: Karen Ann Lewis.