

## The Franchised Church

by Douglas R. Johnson  
March 18, 2001

"McDonald's" is what we think of when the word "franchise" is used. It also can refer to gas stations and or hotels. Just about anything you think of can be franchised.

So why does the concept of franchising churches seem so strange. We understand the Exxon is a group of gas stations and Burger King is a group of hamburger restaurants competing directly with McDonald's. Its is not the concept we object to but the use of the word. The correct word for churches is not franchise but denomination.

Picture a small town in the country that has no hamburger restaurant. McDonald's comes in and opens for business. You want to open a hamburger restaurant just up the block so you go to McDonald's and offer to pay the franchise fees but they turn you down. It is not lack of money but McDonald's protecting their existing franchise. So what do you do. You call Burger King and you open directly across the street from the McDonald's.

So are you providing a real benefit for that small town? Is there that great a difference between McDonald's and Burger King? Both Burger King and McDonald's both say there is a big difference. But do they not say that so they can compete against each other for that same customer that just wants a hamburger? Is one really "better" than the other or are they just different?

The facts of marketing life are that products do not need to be better, just different. You see that difference as an advantage. Frankly, for myself, one time I might get Burger King and another time I might get McDonald's. Other times I prefer getting my burger at Wendy's.

Enough with the hamburger analogy. Let's look at churches in the year 2001. How do various denominations relate to the various hamburger franchises? If you drove into town and saw a sign saying "First xxx Church one mile ahead". Now if this is an old town (more than 100 years old), what kind of church would you be looking for - a 100 year old building? You and I both know better than that. That denomination is not as old as the town. What is meant by the name of the church is that it is the first of that particular denomination in that particular town. It in fact may be the last church established in that town but they still go for "First something Church" name.

Now let's not get hung up on the name. We could have a name

of the town or the name of the county in the official church name. What ever the name, it does not mean that it is the only church in town and we all understand that fact.

Now why are there so many churches in the same small town? Why do you need to drive past other churches to get to the one you are going to? Well it would make perfect sense if one church were sun worshipers and another was moon worshipers but to me it does not make sense when they are all Christian churches that all claim to be directly linked back to the church that Jesus established some 2000 years ago.

"And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." [Luke 10:25-28]

Jesus asked this individual: "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" Did Jesus not know what was in the law? Of course he knew. He asked to find out what this individual knew. It was not a trick question. It was a straightforward question.

Now all the churches I have ever known all claim to be based on the Bible. They all have a "Statement of Faith" that has one element stating their belief in the authority of Scripture. I personally have never gone to a church or even know of any who say "We do not believe the Bible at all". In fact, all of the churches I am familiar with all go back about 500 years to a concept that all beliefs are based solely on what is written in the Bible.

When I go to one of those "Bible believing" churches I rarely have any problem with anything taught from the pulpit. What I often do have a problem with is what is not said. Those doctrines that are unique to that particular church are normally never talked about.

So why should one drive past one church to go to another? What is the justification for having two churches if both teach the same, "whatever is in the Bible"? I suggest we ask the churches what Jesus asked, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" In other words, "You say you follow the Bible just as this other church says they follow the Bible so how come there are two churches? Is Christ divided?"