

Part 2: Identifying the Problem and Starting Toward a Solution

The Establishment and Duration of the Church

At Matthew 16, the Lord Jesus asked His disciples Who people were saying that He is. After they answered this, the following occurred at Matthew 16:15-8

"`But what about you?' he asked. `Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, `You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, `Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it'" (TNIV|ASV|TNIV).

It is commonly known that "Peter" is an Anglicized transliteration of one Greek word for "rock" and "rock" translates another Greek word and that this was a Greek word play.¹ⁿ "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."² Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πέτρα. What is the πέτρα? The πέτρα was what was said shortly before: "'You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God.'" This is the premise which Christ's one church is built on: that truth that Jesus Christ is the Christ and the Son of the living God.³ⁿ

Jesus Christ's church had not been instituted: "I will build my church." He instituted His church at Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB).

The word "church" translates εκκλησια. To New Testament-era Greek-reading/hearing Christians, one meaning of the word⁴ⁿ is this: in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁵ This parallels how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Before the time of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples"; "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB). Hence, at Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Christ was establishing His one community of followers.⁶ⁿ Per Acts 2:47, the Lord Himself is "adding to | them" (NASB|ASV) each newly-saved convert.

The church reached east of the Roman Empire into the Parthian Empire by 100 C.E.,⁷ which is not surprising as the predominant two languages of that empire were Greek and Aramaic.⁸ As Christ was establishing His community of followers, He said "lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He would be with His church to the end of the age of this world, and this means that the church of Christians would continue to exist for Him to be with for that time period. Hence, the church of Christians will continue to exist and this church *has continued to exist since that time.*

¹ We will not consider speculations about conjectured Aramaic conversations. Greek was common in Palestine, ² Peter shows Peter knew Greek, and Jesus is God in flesh and could speak any language. Further, those speculated conversations are not written Scripture, described as "God-breathed" (ESV) in 2 Timothy 3:16.

² MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

³ Alexander Campbell called for the substitution of "UNITY OF FAITH, for unity of opinion" and that the unity of this faith would be "The one fact is expressed in a single proposition - that Jesus the Nazarene is the Messiah."

--- --A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 89 and 100 respectively.

⁴ For more discussion, see *Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church"*.

⁵ Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

⁶ Originally, Christianity was not a separate religious system. Per Acts 2:47 and 21:20-5, Christian Jews continued to be Jews and live as Jews. 84 C.E. was when Christians were excluded from Jewish synagogue* -- the church was over 50 years old.

*in McManners, The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity, page 686.

⁷ Ehrman, The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings, page 45 map.

⁸ Frazee, Two Thousand Years Ago: The World at the Time of Jesus, page 79.

The Church during Jesus' First Followers

Let us discuss ideas about the community of Jesus' first followers, both ideas common in the church and ideas appearing in pop religion. We will progress from wildly erroneous to the truth.

We start with the most erroneous. Beginning in the late 1900's, it began to be speculated that the initial 'Jesus Movement' and the church were distinct things.¹ⁿ Additional speculation has numerous 'communities,' 'trajectories' or 'sects.' Some views being promoted in pop religion have them not necessarily being in conflict, or in direct conflict.²ⁿ Speculation abounds in this market. For instance, there is an extensive list of conjectured early documents that there is no ancient or medieval evidence for.³ⁿ Such speculation on conjectured sources abound among authors who speculate on revisionist church history.⁴ⁿ Without any evidence whatsoever, it is considered perfectly acceptable to assume existence of these conjectured documents. This sort of thing resembles the nature of children's fantasy worlds, and is quite befitting of children's fantasy worlds – but does not befit addressing the real world. Real scholarship requires real evidence to make hypotheses and to make any assertions based upon them.

To speculators, just as conjectured documents require no evidence, so also do related assertions require little to no evidence. Concurrent to the early church, there were two major related religious groups that posed competition and hazards to the early church. One of these was Gnostic religious systems that imported Christian tenets. The other was 'Jesus-ized' Judaism which accepted Jesus' legitimacy to some level, but refused to give up requiring adherence to the Judaic Law by everyone. Speculative revisionism often holds that these two rival groups had a legitimacy as 'heirs' to Jesus' legacy, but that the church just happened to win a power struggle and eradicated them.

The weakest such view: that Gnostic religious systems which imported Christian tenets are

¹ We see references to "the Jesus movement" in 1993 in Burton Mack's The Lost Gospel, and we also see them in the self-appointed "Jesus Seminar" 1993 The Five Gospels.

Assertions of some similar struggle appear in Dominic Crossan's 1994 Jesus.

² For instance, Burton Mack 1995 Who Wrote the New Testament, Bart D. Ehrman 1997 and 2000 The New Testament, Michael White 2004 From Jesus to Christianity, or Barrie Wilson 2008 How Jesus Became Christian.

³ For instance, a document called "Q." This is different from fifth century Codex Guelferbytanus, also called Q, which is a real manuscript of portions of the New Testament. The "Q" talked about in speculative works is a 'lost' first century work for which there is neither surviving manuscript nor ancient report.

Other speculations abound. For instance, manuscript P52 of John has long been dated early 100's. To push the date of John up to 120 C.E. and get around that, it is conjectured that there were multiple layered forms of John* -- even though only one form is extant or reported from antiquity.

There are two forgeries called "Gospel of Thomas." One claims to narrate Christ's childhood. The other is a forgery made by Gnostics. It is widely-accepted that the Gnostic forgery dates from c.100 or later. However, some seek to give this document equal credibility to Scripture's four gospels, so they propose that there was a "first edition" of this written between 50 and 70 C.E.† that underlies the forgery known now. Similarly, for the forgery "Gospel of Peter" there is conjectured a 40's C.E. source "Cross Gospel."†† Among discovered archaeological manuscripts and in historical records, all that exists are the 'editions' and forgeries as extant now.

There is a theory with THREE(!) "Proto-Mark" before the only Mark‡ extant or historically recorded. Unlike real scholarship, Bible-skeptical "scholarship" takes great liberty in making fanciful conjectures without real evidence, and they are accepted in the same spirit and built upon. Real scholarship requires evidence.

* L. White, From Jesus to Christianity, page 307.

† Harris, Understanding the Bible, page 397.

†† Crossan, The Birth of Christianity, pages 120, 510.

‡ Burkett, Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity, page 147.

⁴ Bogusly, some speculators audaciously boast of following evidence closer than others!

'more legitimate' than the church. Gnosticism is pre-Christian and comes from Greek philosophy¹ and pagan ideas.² If Jesus was teaching Greek philosophy and paganism in Jewish Palestine, it is unlikely He would have developed a large following. The reason Gnostic rivals to the church were such a problem: Greek philosophy and paganism were popular in the Hellenized areas where the church's main expansion occurred – not because of any legitimacy as an heir to Jesus' legacy.

The view that 'Jesus-ized' Judaism had a legitimate claim to Jesus' legacy is equally mistaken. The view is that Jesus taught adherence to the Judaic Law, and the church rejected those teachings. The view portrays such groups as the Ebionites as the most legitimate heirs to Jesus' legacy.³ⁿ This is different from Jewish Christianity. It was good for a Jew to be a Christian and continue to follow the Judaic Law oneself, but it was wrong to insist that non-Jewish Christians also adopt the Judaic Law. At Acts 21:20 James said to Paul "'Brother, you can see how many thousands of Jews have become believers. And they think it is very important to obey the law of Moses'" (NCV), and later "you follow the law of Moses in your own life" (NCV) at Acts 21:24. However, Acts 21:25a says "We have already sent a letter to the non-Jewish believers" (NCV) and then refers back to Acts 15:19-30.

Speculative revisionists often seek to blame Paul for 'corrupting' Jesus' message and for taking the 'Jesus Movement' away from Jesus. Burton Mack published a proposal in 1995 that Paul met a "Christ cult" from northern Syria and converted to it.⁴ In such schemes, Paul conspired with some 'Christ religion' distinct from the 'Jesus Movement' to overtake the latter. The assumption is that Paul cared nothing for Jesus. For instance: "The one really good argument that Paul could not use is this: he could have appealed to the practice and teachings of Jesus..." from Barrie Wilson.⁵ While this sort of speculative revisionism has made its presence in pop religion, it does poorly with evidence.⁶ⁿ

We will now actually consider evidence. In Paul's epistle to the Galatians, Paul was writing to an audience that had a lot of skeptics to him. Paul reported at Galatians 1:22-4 "And I was still unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: but they only heard say, He that once persecuted us now preacheth the faith of which he once made havoc; and they glorified God in me" (ASV). Paul was writing to people skeptical of his legitimacy, so it is apparent that the Galatian congregations, whom Paul was writing to, accepted that there were "churches in Judaea which were in Christ." Judaea is where Jesus' earthly ministry ended. Hence, the followers of Jesus where He ministered were "in Christ" before Paul's ministry. The evidence does not permit any speculative revisionism that holds a separate 'early Jesus movement' separate from the church of Christians.

Further, Paul reported at 1 Corinthians 4:17 "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (NBV|ESV) – Paul alluded to this at Acts 20:35. The "principles of behavior in Christ" were what Christ is documented teaching in all four gospels and Acts 20:35. Paul taught the teachings of Jesus Christ. Paul's epistles to congregations were about concerns he had when absent from them. However, in person, and when starting congregations, he was teaching the "principles of behavior" that Jesus Christ taught. The reason Paul's letters to congregations are scant on these "principles of behavior in Christ" is because they already knew them from him in person.

¹ Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, page 5.

² Comfort, Driesbach, The Many Gospels of Jesus: Sorting Out the Story of Jesus, page 43.

³ Fascinatingly, those promoting speculative revisionist views of Jesus' first followers often give most credence to documents written longer after Jesus than the New Testament. For instance, Barrie Wilson appealed to third century forgeries to cast doubt on first century Acts.* Study of history usually prefers older sources.

*B. Wilson, How Jesus Became Christian, pages 165-6.

⁴ Mack, Who Wrote the New Testament, page 75-6.

⁵ Wilson, How Jesus Became Christian, page 125.

⁶ Final illustration: the Jesus Seminar rejected 82% of the words of Jesus as fake, in part due to what they assume Jesus was like.* Then, they accepted only 16% of the things Jesus did as authentic.** There is no way they could 'know' what He was like!

* Funk, Hoover, et al, The Five Gospels, pages 5, 30-32.

** Funk, et al, The Acts of Jesus, page 1.

Further, we have writings of both Peter and Paul which confirm they were not in rival groups. 1 Thessalonians 1:1 opens "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church" (ASV). 1 Peter 5:12 has in the closing "By Silvanus, our faithful brother, as I account him, I have written unto you briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand ye fast therein" (ASV).¹ⁿ Silvanus was a co-laborer with both Paul and Peter. We reject views of speculative revisionist history,²ⁿ and trust New Testament-era records: there was one community of Jesus' initial followers, the church.

We now turn to ideas in the church about its early decades. Orthodox writer Marc Dunaway wrote "The Holy Tradition of the Church, which in the earliest centuries was preserved by oral tradition,..."³ and Catholic writer Dave Armstrong wrote "Catholicism claims that its Tradition is neither more nor less than the preserved teaching of Christ as revealed to, and proclaimed by, the Apostles."⁴ For both of these groups, "Tradition" is masses of mostly distinctly-religious tenets which are foreign to Scripture. It is held that the church in its early decades had these same masses of distinctly-religious tenets mostly foreign to Scripture, whether 'exactly as now' or 'in development.'⁵ⁿ

¹ Speculative revisionists commonly claim Peter did not author 1 Peter; the usual reasons for this claim are based on the assumption that Peter penned the letter alone. As usual, this discords with evidence. 1 Peter 5:12, quoted above, explicitly states that Peter did not write the letter alone. Hence, the main reasons for disputing that 1 Peter was written by Peter go against the evidence, as usual.

² As is apparent, evidence is NOT the real reason why such ideas are getting a rich market in pop religion, and a 'free pass' from being challenged despite sore lack of evidence. What is happening is a fulfillment of prophecy; I present three passages.

2 Peter 3:3 predicts "in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts" (KJV).

2 Timothy 3:1-4 says:

"But know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come. For | people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, | disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, | brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, | puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (ASV|ESV|ASV|ESV|ASV).

2 Timothy 4:3-4 adds

"For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables" (ASV).

Society was going to dive into depravity. They would scoff at truths, and seek out religious teachers who will tell them baseless stories that they want to hear.

As of c. 2000 Western society is the leading world culture, and is growing disdain for moral religion, especially Christianity. As of c. 2000, Western society overall craves pretenses to reject Christianity because of biblical morality, which they increasingly hate. Authors/teachers scoffing 'So-and-so did not write that' and 'Do not believe that writer' while promoting speculative revisionist views of Jesus' first followers naturally get a rich market in pop religion among such a society. The baseless conjectures = "fables" appease this society's "itching ears" by giving them what they want to read/hear: pretenses to reject Christianity and biblical morality within it. Such society craves assurances that refusing to follow the Lord is 'safe,' and will continue to "heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts."

There are unbelievers who claim church affiliation to fill this market. For instance, John Shelby Spong, while presuming a role as an Anglican clergyman, described "the Christ story" as "the mythological tale that begins with a virgin birth and ends with a cosmic victory over death."** He also wrote "a supernatural redeemer who enters our fallen world to restore creation is a theistic myth."^*

The prophesied rebellion against God has even reached Bible publication: "let us protest against God and demand that God consider alternatives"* is insolently written in a "Study Bible." Scripture said such things would happen, and they are. Christians need not be disheartened; just as this is happening as the Bible said it would, Christians can know their eternities will be wonderful just as the Bible says.

* Nancy R. Bowen in The Discipleship Study Bible, page 111.

** Spong, Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism, page 236.

^* Spong, Why Christianity Must Change or Die, page 99.

³ Dunaway, Orthodox Answers to Frequently Asked Questions, page 28.

⁴ Armstrong, A Biblical Defense of Catholicism, page 5.

⁵ Orthodoxy disagrees with Catholicism by not accepting the notion of 'development.'^{*}

1 Corinthians 11:2 Paul as an apostle mentions "the traditions" (HCSB) and commends the Corinthian congregation for keeping them,¹ but these were "the traditions just as I delivered them to you" (HCSB), which is past tense and were known by ALL members of the Corinthian congregation at that time. At 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul also mentions "traditions" as at 1 Corinthians 11:2. Paul instructed the Thessalonians to abide by what he and his coworkers taught them, whether by mouth or letter,² specifically the "traditions you were taught" (HCSB); these "traditions" were solely of the past and given to and known by ALL members of the Thessalonian church³ at that time.

Paul remained a Pharisee per Acts 23:6. The word "traditions" in Judaism referred to passing onward of instruction from earlier teachers, so in Paul's writings, this would have referred to Jesus' teachings.⁴ We can find these teachings recorded in the four gospels and at Acts 20:35.

2 Thessalonians 2:15 mentions "traditions" and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7 has a specific:

"keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you" (NASB).

The "tradition" is that we not live undisciplined lives, and is nothing foreign to what is in Scripture. There is no evidence that the "traditions" was a mass of distinctly-religious tenets mostly alien to Scripture.⁵ⁿ What is approved as "tradition" in Scripture is about regular living, and not distinct from what is in Scripture. This is likely why at 2 Timothy 3:16-7 Paul wrote as he awaited martyrdom:

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for [doctrine], for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness: so that the person who serves God may be complete, entirely instructed for all good work."⁶

Greek translated "complete" is ἀρτιος meaning "perfectly fit,"⁷ "entirely suited; complete."⁸ Paul was awaiting martyrdom, and wrote that Scripture was capable of making "a person who serves God" "complete, entirely instructed for all good work." Scripture was an adequate record of the apostles' "traditions." The church had no "Tradition" mostly foreign to what is in Scripture.

Similarly, the church in its opening decades did not have any masses of distinctly-religious tenets expected to be held by all. The 1500's, 1600's, 1700's, 1800's, and early 1900's saw numerous denominations/'fellowships'/'brotherhoods' appear with 'expected' beliefs on various distinctly-religious details and which overall maintained rivalry with each other.⁹ⁿ Rivalry prompted these groups to take 'stands' on their various disputations. Most of these disputations are not any older than the 1500's, 1600's, 1700's, 1800's or 1900's, and so did not exist during the New Testament era.

Many people assume that the church in its earliest decades was denomination-like,¹⁰ⁿ that it was essentially the 'first denomination,' 'complete' with fixed procedures for worship-specific

* Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura*, page 18.

¹ Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura: An Orthodox Analysis of the Cornerstone of Reformation Theology*, page 23.

² Shea, *By What Authority?*, page 79.

³ J. White, *Roman Catholic Controversy*, page 96.

⁴ In Blackaby, et al, *The Blackaby Study Bible*, page 1435.

⁵ Titus 3:8-9 urges "that they who have believed God may be careful to [devote themselves to good [deeds]]. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings" (ESV|ASV|RSV 1952, NLT 1996|ASV). The "foolish questionings" were such because they had no relevance to "good deeds." What is called "Tradition" among Orthodox, Catholics, and similar is masses of distinctly-religious tenets irrelevant to good deeds, and are the results of such "foolish questionings." It is implausible that masses of them called "Tradition" have any positive relationship with God.

⁶ ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

⁷ Friberg et al, *Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament*, page 76.

⁸ In Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, page 54.

⁹ Of course, there were exceptions.

¹⁰ Some people think Christ gave the apostles unrecorded instructions detailing the common precepts of this 'first denomination.' Scripture does not support this.

activity, and with `stands' on numerous distinctly-religious details related to disputations of the 1500's, 1600's, 1700's, 1800's and/or early 1900's. However, this was not so. First, it is not likely that the New Testament-era church would have had thought-out, dogmatized, and detailed `stands' in disputations that did not begin to occur for 1500+ years after them. Second, the New Testament-era church was supposed to be focused on other subjects.

Many in the c. 2000 church assume that their church interests were those of the New Testament-era church, and often wrongly. The New Testament tells us what the New Testament-era church's real appointed priorities were, as led by the Lord Jesus Christ's Personal apostles.

Per Acts 2:42, after the inaugural sermon of the church, those in the church "devoted themselves to the apostles' |doctrine| and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (ESV|KJV, NKJV|ESV). They would have been obeying what Jesus Christ had told them at Matthew 28:20a "Teach them to obey everything that I **have taught** you" (NCV) – a past tense. Hence, when the church "devoted themselves to the apostles' doctrine" they "devoted themselves" to what Jesus Christ called "everything that I have taught" the apostles. We can find those teachings of Jesus Christ in the four gospels and Acts 20:35, and the church "devoted themselves" to those teachings. This "apostles' doctrine" is what maintained unity in the New Testament-era church.¹

The church was told to stick to those subjects. They were not to seek and have a set of `enforced opinions' over other subjects. This is principled in Romans 14:1-13a:

"Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but [do not] argue about opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, `AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.' So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. So let us no longer censure one another" (NASB|ICB|PEB|NASB|NBV).

All of these disputes had no relevance to what Jesus Christ taught about. Paul told those involved in this "do not argue about opinions" and "let us no longer censure one another." Why? These disagreements had nothing to do with Christians' appointed priorities. Titus 3:8-9a says:

"Faithful is the saying, and concerning these things I desire that thou affirm confidently, to the end that **they who have believed God may be careful to devote themselves to good [deeds]**. These things are good and profitable unto men: but **shun foolish questionings**" (ASV|ESV|RSV 1952, NLT 1996|ASV).

The "foolish questionings" were irrelevant to "good deeds." 1 Timothy 6:3-4a clarifies further:

"If anyone advocates a **different doctrine** and **[does not adhere to] sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to [a godly life]**, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a **morbid interest in [disputes]**" (NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

From these two passages, we see that the New Testament-era church was expected to "adhere to" the "words of our Lord Jesus Christ" and to "doctrine conforming to a godly life" of "good deeds." Other than that, Christians were to "shun foolish questions" and "disputes" unrelated to that. This would enable the church to maintain unity around Christians' appointed priorities.

¹ Holloway, Foster, Renewing God's People, page 13.

The Carnal Flesh

Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts with "sexual immorality," has "idolatry" (ESV) and διχοστασια,¹ and ends with "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV | TNIV). Colossians 3:5 describes "greediness, which is idolatry" (NBV); devotion to things instead of God's will of good deeds is idolatry. Greek διχοστασια is "standing apart,"² meaning acts of dividing from others; such conduct is among carnal sins we tend toward.

Many people see "disagreements" where translated Scripture text has "divisions." The word "divisions" is the translation here for διχοστασια in the ASV, and "seditions" is the translation of διχοστασια in the Geneva Bible, Bishops' Bible, and KJV. Greek διακρισις and διαλογισμος referring to **thought open to question** at Romans 14:1³ do not appear in this list. To disagree and to divide are two different actions, and διχοστασια for the latter is what is in the Galatians 5:19-21 list.

There are four sins that are closely related in the problem of division in the church:

1. Pride/lack of humility;
2. Desire for strife;
3. Idolatry;
4. Desire to divide into factions.

Jesus closes a list at Mark 7:21-3 with "...an evil eye, railing, **pride**, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (ASV emphasis mine). "Pride" as self-exaltation and lack of humility is "evil" per Jesus. We see it in the church. Some people cannot bear being disagreed with, because it implies that they are wrong; their pride will not allow them to accept this as an open question. Here is how far they are willing to go to squelch this: Proverbs 13:10 says "Among the proude there is euer strife" (BishB). This is because many of the proud strive against anyone who presents even a possible threat to potential perception of their 'superior rightness' – actions of this strife range from expressing disapproval by shunning and span all the way to open belligerence.

Proverbs 17:19 says "Whoever loves to quarrel loves to sin" (ICB); Hebrew underneath "to quarrel" is also translated "strife" (ASV, JPS 1985, others) and this refers to hostile arguments. Some people enjoy hostile quarrels, which is beyond indicating disagreement and discussing why. Craving hostile quarrels has long threatened the church; the New Testament warned against it multiple times:

1 Timothy 6:3-4a "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and [does not adhere to] sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to [a godly life], he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in [disputes]"
(NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

Titus 3:8b-11 "I want you to insist on these things, so that they who have [believed God] may be careful to devote themselves to good [deeds]. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned"⁴ⁿ
(ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV).

We are warned of "factious" people with "a morbid interest in disputes." The disputes are "unprofitable" because they are irrelevant to "good deeds" and "godly life." The word translated "factious man" is translated "heretick"⁵ⁿ in the KJV. 'Heresies' transliterates Greek αιρεσις plural for "party"⁶/clique and "choosing."⁷ It shows someone so fixated on an "unprofitable" dispute that s/he seeks a religious faction/party rallied around a chosen religious opinion in that dispute.

¹ Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

² Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

³ Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, page 139.

⁴ "Law" = Old Testament Jewish worship code, still approved then for Jewish-Christians.

⁵ Disjoint from church definition, Greek transliterated "heresies" in the KJV is not plural for 'disliked view' or 'religious error,' but rather simply a clique/"party."* It also means "choosing."† This is intentional choice, not mistake. In the church, this is making factional parties of whatever type based on chosen preference.

*A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

†Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

⁶ A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

⁷ Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

Many people have come to value their religious opinions so much as to make them objects of religious servitude. Such religious devotion causes them to see Christians who disagree with those religious opinions, and do not share loyalty to them, as having 'unlike faith.' 2 Peter 1:1 names "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV, ESV); these religious opinions = things are given the place of Christ-God as targets of religious devotion and primary distinguishers of faith, and so are made idols.

We have studied how the church is the community of people who follow Christ's teachings. Many people have acted as if the church, or 'church faithful,' should be defined by who agrees with their teachings about 'how to follow Christ.' 2 Peter 1:1 names "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV, ESV). Isaiah 14:12-15 addresses someone who has thought "I will be like the Most High" (JPS 1917). Those thinking that Christ's church is defined by who agrees with them have done this.

When these self-exaltations, idolatries, desires for strife-quarrels, desires to justify proud egos, and desires to 'stand apart from the crowd' all mixed in various ways, a result was division. This has then been promoted to many unsuspecting people by rationalizations differing from the initial causes.

There is a difference between disagreement and division. Divisive persons often **wrongly** think that the cause of division is the presence of ideas they disagree with. This is because divisive persons divide from anyone they disagree with -- the *real* cause is their own carnal divisiveness.

After the Apostles

The Reformation was caused by gaps between what was seen in Scripture versus events in Catholic¹ⁿ congregations where the Reformation began, although Orthodoxy was similar. Aberrations from New Testament practice appear as early as the decades around 100 C.E..

In Scripture, the only practice we see is baptism in water promptly after conversion. The main meaning of the Greek transliterated "baptize/baptism" is "dip,"² "make overwhelmed,"³ "immerse,"⁴ "completely submerge."⁵ This is assumed common to Christians at Romans 6:2-11 where believers are pictured buried in the ground and resurrected out as they are baptized in water and raised.

In contrast, Orthodoxy and Catholicism call for "baptism" of infants who cannot understand to believe. Catholicism per *Catechism* 1259-60 considers baptized with "baptism of desire" and saved any unbaptized adult believer who would have been baptized, but as of 1997 still held salvation of unbaptized infants uncertain and urged "baptism" in *Catechism* 1260. Orthodoxy calls for "air baptism" in cases where water would be unsafe, and replaces this with a water ceremony later when possible.⁶ Returning to Scripture, 1 Peter 3:20-1 refers to "water"⁷ and relates baptism to it as a "figure | doth now save you, even baptism, | not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a |clear conscience" (BishB|ASV|NASB|RSV 1952); this shows that where there is no repentance for baptism to represent, there is no baptism. In c. 100 C. E., *Didache* chapter 7 had "pour" as a secondary alternative to baptism, and calls for a delay of baptism for at least one full day:

"Now concerning baptism, baptize as follows: after you have reviewed all these things, baptize 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' in running water. But if you have no running water, then baptize in some other water; and if you are not able to baptize in cold water, then do so in warm. But if you have neither, then pour water on the head three times 'in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.' And before the baptism, let the one baptizing and

¹ Some exclude Catholicism as "works-salvation," but approved teaching has "Christians believe that they are justified - made right with God - not through a perfect keeping of religious laws, but by faith in Christ" -- Catholic Youth Bible, page 1382.

² Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 50 NT.

³ Strong, Exhaustive Concordance, page *Greek Lexicon* 16.

⁴ New Baptist Church Manual, page 36; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1214 in Catechism of the Catholic Church, page 312. Note: Many Baptists use none of the 'Baptist Church Manuals.'

⁵ Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 191.

⁶ Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 194.

⁷ Noticed from "Baptism, which is symbolized by that water" (ISV).

the one who is to be baptized fast, as well as any others who are able. Also, you must instruct the one who is to be baptized to fast for one or two days beforehand."¹

Baptism was to be "in" water as immersion, but pouring was allowed sometimes, and delay of at least a day was required; both discord with THE sole practice repeatedly exemplified in the New Testament.

Both Orthodoxy and Catholicism call for prayers to entities other than God, such as Mary. Further, graphical representations of the devotee are the direction to which these acts of worship are directed. In Scripture, prayer goes only to God the Father or to God the Son Jesus Christ.

Both have their congregations run by monarchical bishops. In Scripture, multiple leaders governed each congregation; no such leaders had authority over congregations beyond themselves.

At 2 Timothy 3:15-4:2, the apostle Paul awaits martyrdom, and instructs Timothy to follow Scripture for authority from then on.²ⁿ Congregations were to go under authority of Scripture. Contrary to this, some later monarchical bishops claimed apostle-type authority over congregations other than their own – disregarding that existence of monarchical bishops is itself non-Scriptural.

Orthodoxy holds bishops as "successors of the Apostles"³; Catholicism has at *Catechism* 862

"` Just as the office which the Lord confided to Peter alone, as first of the apostles, destined to be transmitted to his successors, is a permanent one, so also endures the office, which the apostles received, of shepherding the Church, a charge destined to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops."⁴

They hold "the Roman Pontiff" to be "Peter's successor" and "the bishops, the successors of the apostles" per *Catechism* 880.⁵ Both denominations claim that monarchical bishops have run churches since the apostles' time. In Scripture and in history, this is not what we see.

We consider Scripture and early church records, notably the epistle of the church at Rome to that in Corinth, now called *I Clement*, and the letters of Ignatius and Polycarp. *I Clement* was written in the last decades of the first century, and the letters of Ignatius and Polycarp come from c. 110 C.E.. A possibility that the one-bishop system of church government was a novelty which was spreading west when Ignatius wrote has been suggested by historians.⁶ The letters of Ignatius, all but one of which were written to churches in Greece and eastward, repeatedly push for submission to the local church's singular bishop,⁷ but the only western church written to, that at Rome, mentions no singular bishop.⁸ *I Clement* does not mention a singular leader giving direction to the church at Corinth: the letter identifies itself to open as "The church of God which

¹ Holmes et al, The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, page 259.

² 2 Timothy 1:6 has "For which cause I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee through the laying on of my hands" (ASV), and 1 Timothy 4:14 says that Timothy had been appointed to church leadership. Hints of being a successor were there, but Paul wrote to him at 2 Timothy 3:16-7a "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for |doctrine|, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete" (ESV|KJV, NKJV|ASV). Greek απτιος translated "complete" means "perfectly fit"* "entirely suited; complete"; the relevant phrase in 3:17a can be translated about Scripture "It is God's way of preparing us in every way" (NLT 1996). He went on at 4:1-2 "I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (ASV). Paul noted impending death later in chapter 4 with uncertainty of seeing Timothy again.

* Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 76.

**In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 54.

³ Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 99.

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, page 229.

⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, page 233.

⁶ Jefford et al, Reading the Apostolic Fathers, page 62.

⁷ Jefford et al, Reading the Apostolic Fathers, pages 62-3.

⁸ Jefford et al, Reading the Apostolic Fathers, page 63.

sojourns in Rome to the church of God which sojourns in Corinth...."¹ It was one congregation to another one congregation. The preferred leadership is described at *I Clement* 47:6 as follows:

"It is disgraceful, dear friends, yes, utterly disgraceful, that it should be reported that the well-established and ancient church of the Corinthians, because of one or two persons, is rebelling against its presbyters."²

Notice the plural "presbyters." In the epistles of Ignatius, we saw no reference to a monarchical leadership at Rome in c. 110 C.E.. The same is true at Corinth in the late first century C.E.. The same is true in the New Testament. The word transliterated "presbyters" is πρεσβυτερους.³ At Titus 1:5 we have καταστησης κατα πολιν πρεσβυτερους literally "appoint in each city | Officers"⁴; Greek translated "Officers" is πρεσβυτερους and 1 Timothy 5:17 shows that these governed congregations in New Testament times⁵: "Os presbiteros que governam bem sejam estimados" (ARC) = "The presbyters that govern well let-them-be esteemed" with the same Greek word. Greek πρεσβυτερους is translated into Spanish as "líderes" (TLA, NBD) = "leaders." Hence, in Titus 1:5 God through Paul can be translated as directing "appoint in each city leaders"; in each individual congregation there was to be appointed *multiple* leaders, and that is how churches were governed in New Testament times. Acts 20:17 has πρεσβυτερους της εκκλησιας = "presbíteros da | congregacion"⁶ = "presbyters of-the congregation." Again, this shows one congregation, multiple presbyters/leaders.

Beyond the New Testament, there is more evidence. Polycarp was a student of the apostle John. Ignatius c. 110 wrote to Polycarp "bishop of the church of the Smyrnaeans, or rather who has God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as his bishop"⁷ in a letter to him. Ignatius seemed to know that Polycarp felt that the only monarchical bishop in the Lord's church is the Lord. Polycarp rejected this elevated status in his epistle: "Polycarp and the presbyters with him"⁸ in the opening salutation. Moving west, the letter "the church of God which sojourns in Rome to the church of God which sojourns in Corinth"⁹ now called *1 Clement* shows no sign of Rome being directed by one leader, but throughout gives directives as a whole congregation, and directs the Corinthian congregation to end its rebellion against its own plural presbyters/leaders. The Ignatius's letter to Rome from c.110 does not mention a singular leading bishop there; again, this is the only case where he writes to a church but does not mention a singular leading bishop. It is apparent that at the turn at the end of the first century, at least the congregations west of Asia Minor were not run by monarchical bishops but rather still by multiple leaders, as per the New Testament practice.

Both Orthodoxy and Catholicism's books of doctrine and practice are replete with things Scripture makes no mention of. To name just a few things, we observe that within decades of the New Testament's completion, there were changes from New Testament practice in the area of how the initiation rite of baptism was practiced and to whom, as well as in how churches were governed.

There was also a lack of loyalty to Jesus Christ's teachings. Papias of c. 130/140 Asia Minor wrote a treatise *Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord* which is lost; fourth century Eusebius quotes a copy. Papias gives us some great information about the church situation in his time. We start with

"I will not hesitate to set down for you, along with my interpretations, everything I carefully learned then from the elders and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For unlike most people, I did not enjoy those who have a great deal to say"¹⁰

¹ Holmes et al, [The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations](#), page 29.

² Holmes et al, [The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations](#), page 83.

³ Holmes et al, [The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations](#), page 82.

⁴ Marshall, [The Interlinear NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament](#), page 620 | TCNT.

⁵ [New Pilgrim Study Bible](#), pages 1700-1.

⁶ ARA| English W. Tyndale New Testament 1526.

⁷ In Holmes, et al, [The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations](#), page 195.

⁸ In Holmes, et al, [The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations](#), page 207.

⁹ Holmes et al, [The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations](#), page 29.

¹⁰ In Holmes, et al, [The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations](#), page 565.

as quoted by Eusebius. Papias enjoyed instead "those who taught the truth"¹ in contrast to "those who have a great deal to say" who were popular among "most people"² in the church. As he continued his *Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord*, Papias had this further dislike versus like contrast:

"nor in those who related strange commandments, but in those who rehearsed the commandments given by the Lord to faith, and proceeding from the truth itself. If, then, any one who had attended on the elders came, I asked minutely after their sayings – what Andrew or Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or Thomas, or by James, or by John or by Matthew, or by any other of the Lord's disciples: which things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord say."³

In Papias's time, which was c. 130/140 C.E., "most people" in the church enjoyed "those who have a great deal to say" and "who related strange commandments" instead of "those who taught the truth" and "those who rehearsed the commandments given by the Lord." In Papias's time, which was just a few decades after the apostles, "most people" in the church were more open to giving heed to people passing on their own ideas instead of the Lord's teachings.

The Closing of the New Testament Era

One would think all this began after the last apostle passed away, but it has been suggested that the rebellion occurred during the lives of the apostles.⁴ There are indications of this in Scripture.

Paul wrote of people whose priorities differed from his at 1 Timothy 1:3-7a

"As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men **not to teach strange doctrines**, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have **turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers**" (NASB).

1 Timothy 6:3-4a clarifies further:

"If anyone advocates a **different doctrine** and **does not adhere to sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to a godly life**, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in **disputes**" (NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

Greek translated "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."⁵ Here, we see people who wanted to "teach strange doctrines" that did not adhere to the subject of the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ." Instead, they wanted to "teach strange doctrines" related to "mere speculation" and "fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers." In the prior essay, we quoted Papias roughly seven decades later reporting the exact same phenomenon, and reporting it to be very well-liked by most people in the church. It was starting in Paul's time, and Paul did not like it – but it was happening regardless of Paul's displeasure.

3 John refers to a situation of active rebellion in a congregation against the apostle John himself. John wrote at 3 John verse 9 "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to |have the pre-eminence among them|, does not accept our authority" (TNIV|ABUV|NBV). 3 John verse 10 has "he refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church" (TNIV). Here, one person took preeminence and opposed anyone trying to do what John wanted; no mention is made of other presbyters opposing this or of the congregation opposing the neutralizing of other presbyters by Diotrephes. Hence, we see an open rebellion in the church against the apostle John himself.

¹ As quoted by DeGroot, The Restoration Principle, page 31.

² In Holmes, et al, The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, page 565.

³ As quoted by DeGroot, The Restoration Principle, page 31.

⁴ Joseph Felding McConkie in Millet, Matthews, Plain and Precious Truths Restored, page 34.

Their suggestion was that the apostles were murdered by the church, which they inferred from a writing of Joseph Smith. My basis and conclusion are different, but credit was due for the idea.

⁵ in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

After the last apostle died, this insubordination apparently spread throughout the church. Some were evidently in callous rebellion even before the death of all apostles. Probably others were waiting for the last apostle to die so that they could do as they wished. Hence, we have open rebellion as seen from Scripture, but we may also have had simple arrogance that church leadership ought to be able to do whatever it wanted. Nonetheless, due to this arrogance against the guidance of the apostles, within decades of the New Testament's completion, the church looked different than that shown in the New Testament, and more so as centuries passed.

The Effects

The church began to institutionalize itself as an organization. The Bible meaning for the Bible term *ἐκκλησία* "church" became lost from the church's collective consciousness.¹ⁿ The church was ordained to be the community of Jesus Christ's followers.²ⁿ Rather than just go with the Bible to simply be the *ἐκκλησία* community of followers of Jesus Christ, the church began to focus more on itself as a religious organization. It produced more and more religious precepts with no direct focus on proper value of Jesus Christ, proper value on His work, or on serving Him in overall regular life. It evolved systems of religious governance to ensure uniform meeting-time etiquette and procedure, plus enforce conformity of agreement on religious tenets that had/have no direct focus on a proper esteem of Jesus Christ, of His work, or on serving Him in overall regular life.

As "church" came to mean an institutionalized organization, it followed that disagreement on institutional matters would be viewed as a breach in the church. Carnal pride and carnal divisive urges exploited this. It became common belief that any disagreement meant division in the church, and created multiple churches. In c. 2000, it is still common to think of 'one church' as meaning all denominations merged into one with every person sharing agreement on nearly every trivial detail.

As early as the mid-100's the church began arguing over when to celebrate Easter, and by the end of that century the bishop of Rome 'excommunicated' part of the church over it.³ In 550 C.E., during the Monophysite dispute over how Jesus Christ is both human and divine, a church Council of Carthage 'excommunicated' the bishop at Rome for wavering even though he had their position.⁴

We notice a huge difference between these later church priorities and the Acts 2:42 "apostles' doctrine" (KJV, NKJV). Paul, an apostle, wrote in Titus 3:8-9a

"Faithful is the saying, and concerning these things I desire that thou affirm confidently, to the end that **they who have believed God may be careful to devote themselves to good [deeds]**. These things are good and profitable unto men: but **shun foolish questionings**" [ASV|ESV|RSV 1952, NLT 1996|ASV].

The "foolish questionings" were irrelevant to "good deeds" which Christians were to "devote themselves" to. Arguments over when to celebrate Easter and arguments over speculations about exactly how Jesus Christ is one Person hardly fit this.

As "church" ceased to mean simply the community of Jesus Christ's followers, and instead came to mean an institutionalized organization, it followed that disagreement on institutional matters would be viewed as a breach in the church. In addition, 2 Timothy 2:23 warned "refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels" (NASB), and too few leaders heeded this warning. Furthermore, many leaders had carnal prideful lusts to have everyone agree with them, and made this a top priority in church business. These three factors combined to yield tragic results.

We discussed how in the mid-100's the church began arguing over when to celebrate Easter, and by the end of that century, the bishop of Rome was willing to initiate a church split over that triviality. Things did not get any better from there.

¹ Discussed in *Part 2/The Establishment and Duration of the Church of Christians*.

² Discussed in *Part 2/The Establishment and Duration of the Church of Christians*.

³ Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, page 137.

⁴ Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, page 42.

In the early 400's, Nestorius denied that Mary was "Mother of God" because it was unscriptural and was most suited to people who denied Christ's humanity.¹ He had good reason to do so, as God existed before Mary and so she could not be God's mother. He held that Jesus Christ was a divine being and human being united in one Person,² which differed from Gnosticism's ideas that Jesus and Christ remained separate entities. What caused hostility was his rejection of the Mary title, and the whole argument was a pointless dispute of specifics about how Jesus Christ was both human and divine – one of those Titus 3:8-9 "foolish questionings" (ASV). Nestorius and bishops who agreed with him were condemned and ejected from fellowship³ by dominant leaders. Several eastern bishops who agreed with Nestorius united and formed a separate church group⁴ in response.

In the early to mid-400's, the Monophysite controversy began. Monophysites hold that Jesus Christ had solely His divine nature while others believed He had both a divine and human nature. Leaders who held each side sent to the bishop of Rome for a judgment, who decided against Monophysitism, and then the Council of Chalcedon convened and also went against Monophysitism.⁵ Finally, in 452, the empress of Rome and her consort decreed that all Christians were to adopt the Nicene Creed, the creed of Constantinople, and the Chalcedonian Creed, and also there was to be no further controversy.⁶ Of course, this meant that Christians who would not subscribe to the Chalcedonian creed were not accepted, and large portions of the church were divided from.

This decree of state in 452 resulted in the church in Egypt becoming separate from the proto-Orthodox/proto-Catholic branch of the church.⁷ South of Egypt in Nubia, there is archaeological evidence that the church existed there as early as c. 450,⁸ and about a century later, Monophysitism had the privileged position there.⁹ Close association between the church in Egypt and the church in Ethiopia had been established by Athanasius, a 300's church leader.¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, the church in Ethiopia was passionately Monophysite from the 400's onward.¹¹ The decree of state in 452 formed division against the church in Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia.

Asia also faced problems from insistence on agreement. In the Syriac church, Chalcedonian theology was enforced by Byzantine Empire authorities in urban areas, but largely rejected in the countryside.¹² The part of the Syriac church in the Byzantine Empire tended to become Monophysites and the part in the Persian Empire tended to become Nestorians.¹³ As discussed earlier in this essay, Nestorians had to become a separate church group due to hostility from among the proto-Orthodox/proto-Catholic branch. The church in Arabia rejected the Council of Chalcedon as Nestorians.¹⁴ The church in Persia was Nestorian.¹⁵ Portions of Palestine to the northeast and east were Monophysite territory.¹⁶ The church in Armenia had rejected the Council of Chalcedon.¹⁷ The proto-Orthodox/proto-Catholic leaders in the 452 imperial decree rejected all Christians who did not hold the opinions of Chalcedon, and thereby divided against large geographic portions of the church in two continents – including the one where the church started.

¹ H. D. McDonald essay in S. Ferguson, Wright, New Dictionary of Theology, page 457.

² H. D. McDonald essay in S. Ferguson, Wright, New Dictionary of Theology, page 457.

³ Trimmingham, Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times, page 161.

⁴ H. D. McDonald essay in S. Ferguson, Wright, New Dictionary of Theology, page 457.

⁵ H. D. McDonald essay in S. Ferguson, Wright, New Dictionary of Theology, page 443.

⁶ R. Olson, The Story of Christian Theology, page 232.

⁷ Sundkler, Steed, A History of the Church in Africa, page 16.

⁸ Sundkler, Steed, A History of the Church in Africa, page 30.

⁹ Sundkler, Steed, A History of the Church in Africa, page 31.

¹⁰ Sundkler, Steed, A History of the Church in Africa, page 30.

¹¹ Isichi, A History of Christianity in Africa, page 33.

¹² Roberson, The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey, page 34.

¹³ Trimmingham, Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times, page 137.

¹⁴ R. Olson, The Story of Christian Theology, page 232.

¹⁵ Moffett, A History of Christianity in Asia, page 1:193.

¹⁶ In Dowley, The Baker Atlas of Christian History, page 85 map.

¹⁷ González, The Story of Christianity, page 1:261.

Much of Near East and Middle East in Asia got conquered by Muslim military expansion in the 600's, but even as late as the eleventh century, Asia still had at least one third of the Christian population.¹ This was the century of the 1054 split of Catholic congregations from the Orthodox congregations. However, before that split which mainly affected the church in Europe, the church overall in Asia + Europe + Africa had been divided for over a half-millennium because of insistence on agreement in speculations over 'exactly how' Jesus Christ was both human and divine.

The church in Europe and neighboring regions had one dominant body until 1054, but the strains continued over the centuries due to disagreements and the same insistence by many of being agreed with.²ⁿ This body's leadership, generally insistent on being agreed with, had trouble agreeing about which way it wanted to go on certain topics. At that time, wishes of church leadership, and not the written Word of God, dictated what the church would teach and practice. In 1054 the bishop of Rome and supporters refused to accept being disagreed with any longer, and initiated a split in the dominant church body by sending a letter of "excommunication"³ against the others, resulting in a Catholic group separate from the Orthodox group. The 1100's began a persistent underflow of pushes for reformation that sometimes broke out locally.⁴ By the 1500's the two dominant church bodies were so far off their biblical bases that calls to return to Scripture became largescale. In tacit admission of the disparity, church authorities initially opposed mass printing of Scripture for the common people and/or their translation into languages understandable by the common people.⁵ⁿ

This was a violent time. In 1408, when England was Catholic, the Oxford Council prohibited Scripture editions in common languages⁶ after the John Wycliffe Bible in Middle English was being circulated.⁷ⁿ Catholic authorities in Belgium apprehended English translator William Tyndale to get him martyred in England in 1536.⁸ The first complete Bible translation into Spanish from texts in the original languages was done by Cassiodoro/Casiodoro de Reyna/Reina, a refugee from the Spanish Inquisition,⁹ in 1569. Cypriano/Cipriano de Valera finished a 1602 revision of the 1569 Reina Bible; he was another refugee from the Spanish Inquisition.¹⁰ Predecessor Francisco de Enzinas, despite a special effort to avoid offending anyone with his 1543 New Testament translation, was imprisoned yet escaped and his translation was suppressed.¹¹ In Orthodox territory, a 1600's translation into modern Greek done by Archimandrite Maximos Kallipolites had a preface by sponsor Kyrillos Loukaris which reports that it had opponents who wanted to keep people from knowing the Scriptures.¹² This opposition to Scripture being accessible to the masses either by availability, by literacy, or both was common then due to the fact that these church authorities did not see how the Scriptures would support the legitimacy of the operations of the congregations that they led.

¹ Jenkins, Lost History of Christianity, page 4.

² By the 1500's/1600's Reformation, 'confessions of faith' required for acceptance in some church groups had reached scores of pages -- Osborn, The Faith We Affirm, page 33.

³ Stephanou, How the Orthodox Church Differs from Roman Catholicism, page 5.

⁴ Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, page 32.

⁵ This was not a universal practice in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic groups. Catholic authorities in Italy or France had no objection to translation of Scripture into common languages there.* Orthodox bishop Kyrillos Loukaris in the 1600's supported a Protestant proposal to translate the Bible into modern Greek.†

* E. North, The Book of a Thousand Tongues, page 304.

† Vaporis, Translating the Scriptures into Modern Greek, page 5.

⁶ Lewis, The English Bible From KJV To NIV, page 20.

⁷ This has since changed. In the 1900's, Catholic clergy began a push for more involvement with Scripture.*

* Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, page 1013.

⁸ John K. Hutcheson in J. Williams, Shaylor, From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man, page 114.

⁹ González, La Era de los Reformadores, page 211.

¹⁰ E. North, The Book of a Thousand Tongues, page 307.

¹¹ E. North, The Book of a Thousand Tongues, page 304.

¹² Vaporis, Translating the Bible into Modern Greek, pages 7-8.

The dominant groups of the church were over 1000 years distant from a biblical start, so there was confusion among new groups on how to best follow Scripture. Any group who disagreed with the older dominant church bodies was violently opposed, forcing separation. Besides the dominant church bodies, there was also an equally-opposed population of non-conformists centuries old:

- Bishop Hossius 1556: "...Anabaptists; since there have been none for these *twelve hundred years past* that have been more grievously punished."¹
- Bishop Erasmus 1529: "The Anabaptists of Switzerland, although they are very numerous..."²

Füsslin reported "'There was a great difference between Anabaptists and Anabaptists...'"³ For there to have been such a large quantity and wide variation among them even as the Reformation began, the Anabaptists had to have been a pre-Reformation mass, as Hossius reported. Some Protestants sought to suppress the Anabaptists before Catholicism.⁴ As a class of Christian groups, the Anabaptists may have been centuries old already. Attempts like theirs to recreate New Testament-era congregation practice contributed to the Reformation, and ultimately to the Restoration⁵ⁿ in the 1800's.

The Reformation and thereafter involved much uncertainty. Many Christians wanted to reform the church rightly, but there was wide disagreement over how. Even after the Reformation, it was common to think older groups 'missed something.' Uncertainty yields disagreement.

There was disagreement as to whether to keep as much non-biblical medieval church tradition as possible, or discard it all: Lutheranism and the early Baptists were involved in this. Among groups that wanted to retain some of those traditions, there was disagreement on how much to retain versus discard: for examples, 1) Lutheranism is more similar to Catholicism than are most other Protestant viewpoints, and 2) most Christians are 'led in prayer' in congregational prayer while Pentecostals say their own prayers out loud for petitions listed to the congregation.⁶ⁿ There were differences in how closely Scripture should be followed today, such as groups that baptize/immerse versus groups who think substituted procedures are okay. There were differences in how Bible texts were understood, such as 1) passages regarding baptism, faith, and salvation between Baptists and the Churches of Christ, or 2) passages about Holy Spirit activity, with Holiness/Pentecostal/Charismatic groups believing that the Holy Spirit is more active now than many other groups think. There were differences on how best to follow Scripture's commands; for example: whether to require delayed obedience in baptism for reasons beyond Scripture, as is common among Baptists and Catholics to ensure baptism of only proper candidates, versus baptizing promptly after conversion as among Apostolic Pentecostals, the Independent Christian churches, and the Churches of Christ. There was disagreement on how much to distrust older Christian groups; for example, despite extensive objections to the Catholic system among Baptists, they adopt the precept of the Trinity because of Scripture, while Apostolic Pentecostals usually distrust this precept because it is in Catholicism and not explicit in Scripture.⁷ⁿ There is difference on expected degree of conformity of thought from studying Scripture; most Church of Christ leaderships expect and require deep conformity, while the Disciples of Christ believe all Christians should genuinely be allowed to study for themselves and be guided by whatever results.

¹ Orchard, [A Concise History of Foreign Baptists](#), page 364.

² Orchard, [A Concise History of Foreign Baptists](#), page 358.

³ Quoted in Vedder, [A Short History of the Baptists](#), page 180.

⁴ Shelly Cunningham article in Anthony, [Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education](#), page 747.

⁵ Anabaptist descendent groups include Mennonites/Amish, some Brethren, Baptists and descendent groups of the Restoration: Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and the Independent Christian churches.

⁶ This practice is based upon Acts 4:24a, once translated "And when they heard it, they lift up their voices to God with one accord, and said..." (GenB). They were all in agreement, and at that moment they all lifted up their plural "voices" to pray.

⁷ Denial of the Trinity is NOT necessarily denial of the Deity of Jesus Christ. Oneness Pentecostals infer Scripture to teach that Jesus Christ is God but without a Trinity.

There is disagreement on what 'unity' means: the Evangelical Free Church, the Disciples of Christ, and many non-denominational congregations see it as unity in serving Christ, while many others see it as mutual agreement over affairs of separate congregation meetings. Differences have multiplied and new types of congregations have continued to form.

We must accept that we will never all agree on everything. The best debater/s will never convince everyone to agree on everything. Each group will have members who genuinely believe that their group's precepts are how they best please the Lord. Unity based on near-total agreement on congregation belief/practice is not possible and cannot be based on that – nor in Scripture is it.

A Basis for Christian Agreement -- Preliminary

Had the post-apostolic church not left the path of the apostles and Scripture, disagreements would never have reached the extent that they have. When two people get separated accidentally, they often retrace their way back to where they were last together. Doing similar might work well for the church: we would get as close as possible to the ways things were done in the New Testament. This certainly would not eliminate disagreements, but it would minimize disagreements.

Many Christians do not see the merit of doing this as much as others, but Ephesians 4:2 tells us to be "making allowances for each other's faults" (NLT 1996) and that includes wrongness. A basis for agreement should be how much we can agree about Scripture's teachings. A functional church unity must include seeking *common ground* in inference of Scripture and what could be done together.

Our Procedures for Handling Scripture – Full Basis

To start, the Lord Jesus Christ said what is translated "a Escritura não pode falhar (ARA) = "the Scripture no/not <=> it-can fail" at John 10:35. It cannot fail to be accurate, and should always be believed.¹ⁿ **Jesus Christ taught this**, so His followers should agree.²ⁿ

In Scripture, what is called "Scripture" is not always just the Old Testament. At what is now 1 Timothy 5:18 God through Paul wrote "the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his hire" (ASV); the first quote of "the scripture" here is from Deuteronomy 25:4, and the second is from Luke 10:7.³ Compare the Greek:

Luke 10:7 end

1 Timothy 5:18 second quote

αξιολος γαρ ο εργατης του μισθου αυτου

Αξιολος ο εργατης του μισθου αυτου⁴

an exact match minus γάρ = "for."⁵ In Luke 10:7, the clause was linked by "for" to a prior statement of Jesus, but in 1 Timothy 5:18 the clause was meant to be independent, so this would be a fitting grammatical adjustment. Rules for quotation were not as strict in the ancient world as they are in American society. When "the scripture" was quoted, what is now Luke 10:7 was included here. In Scripture, "Scripture" sometimes means both Old and New Testament Scripture.

Unity Note: Many people wrongly blame Bible belief for church division. They notice that highly-factionous groups tend to be fundamentalist groups, and wrongly see the association as a sign of causation. In reality, the cause is failure to follow Scripture's teachings on how to handle disagreement.

People who wrongly blame church division on Bible belief try to fix division by disparaging Scripture. They hope that if people cease to believe the Bible, unity will result. They do not realize that arguments would arise over what parts of Scripture to believe.

Per John 10:35, Jesus Christ held that Scripture is to be believed. Denying that Scripture is always to be believed cannot bring any unity which is not contrary to Jesus Christ's teachings.

¹ New Testament-era Jews viewed Scripture as adequate for teaching the rudiments of religion, history and science -- Mould, Essentials of Bible History, page 473.

² As detractors of Scripture do endless 'what about' attacks on God's written Word in "hath God said" (KJV) Genesis 3:1-4 style, Christians simply need to agree with Jesus Christ and resolve that **'What the written Word of God says, goes -- period.'**

³ Noted in Paige Patterson's article in Criswell, Believer's Study Bible, page 1843.

⁴ In Douglas, New Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, pages 246, 733.

⁵ In Douglas, New Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 246.

To rightly consider Scripture, we need to remember Who its author is. 2 Timothy 3:16-7 says

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness: so that the person who serves God may be complete, entirely instructed for all good work."¹

There was a human component in writing Scripture, but ultimately, the making of Scripture is God's direct activity. Scripture should be treated as the written Word of God.²ⁿ

2 Timothy 2:15 has "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth" (ASV).³ⁿ To "handle aright the word of truth" we need to learn it and how to use it right. All individuals with access to the written Word of God have a duty to make this effort⁴ⁿ for themselves.

Accuracy and Thoroughness

Scripture is accurate anytime it speaks on any subject. However, Scripture is given "so that the person who serves God may be complete, *entirely instructed for all good work.*"

Scripture was **NOT** given to provide thorough answers to every religious curiosity of mortals.

¹ ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

² It is important to treat Scripture as God's written Word and to recognize it both as absolute divine truth and as distinct from mortals' written words.

In the late 1800's, many church influencers began denying Scripture's truth value, and this has spread to Christians. Scripture gets treated as the words of mortals, and it has affected Bible publishing. For instance, about 1 Timothy 6:1-2, one study Bible reads "These verses are a part of a long, sad legacy within the church—that continues to the present—of complicity with human rights abuses."* The passage urges slaves to behave in ways that would keep people from blaspheming the Lord; it shows no approval of slavery, and slavery was indeed an injustice written against at 1:10 "slave traders" (TNIV) -- but here is the problem of that comment: it treats Scripture as the words of the church, and not as the written Word of God.

Another Bible-denying study Bible praises a 200's C.E. enemy of Christianity named Porphyry and his redating of Daniel to the 160's B.C.E.: the claim is that he "appears to have been a more serious scholar of the Bible" and "his general view is the one accepted by modern scholars."** This praises an enemy of Christianity and claims a modern consensus that is nonexistent. There are plenty of modern scholars who honor the written Word of God and know that Daniel is from the 500's B.C.E..

Even before humans knew sin, God had already spoken to them. Per Genesis 2:17, He had told them not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge or "thou shalt surely die" (JPS 1917). At Genesis 3:1-4, Satan came to entice Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. First, Satan said "Yea, hath God said" (JPS 1917) and then denied what God said: "Ye shall not surely die" (JPS 1917). She ate, then got Adam to eat, and from this, sin entered the world. The very first effort to entice sin among mortals was to deny what God said. Intentions aside, denial of God's Word in any form facilitates sin.

Now we discuss treating words of mortals about Scripture as if they are divine truths. The Pharisees' prominent work was meticulous examination of the Old Testament Law, devising of specific guidelines for following it in many possible situations, and passing those on as tradition.^* The Old Testament Law was the first five books of Scripture. Jesus Christ reproved religious leaders' "tradition of men" (ASV) meaning their "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (ESV) at Mark 7:8-9 and Matthew 15:6-9. This "tradition of men" was a mass of inferences of Scripture, and the problem was that they were treating this "tradition of men" as divine truths: they were treating their inferences of Scripture as divine truths.

The church was warned against this. Revelation 22:18 opposes "add unto" (ASV) Scripture. When people treat inferences of a Scripture passage as Scripture itself, it has the same effect of adding them right into the text. This is prohibited.

* Deborah Krause in Birch et al, The Discipleship Study Bible, page 2026.

** Elizabeth A. Clark article in Suggs, et al, The Oxford Study Bible, page *133.

^* NLT Study Bible, page 1581.

³ Intentionally mishandling Scripture to appear to 'win' arguments violates this verse.

⁴ EVERY usable means should be used, including translations into languages other than English. There is NO merit to prejudices that non-English speakers are intellectually inferior and/or that the translations used by non-English speaking peoples are inherently 'second-rate.' They should be assumed 'on par' with English counterparts.

In seeking to understand New Testament Scripture fully, it is impossible to do so without considering the New Testament church's text and the New Testament church's world. The New Testament was not written in English direct to Americans. The New Testament was written in a dialect of ancient Greek, and in and to a world with cultures and religious systems different from ours. It is important to always remember that. Refusing to consider¹ⁿ the New Testament churches' Bible texts in the New Testament churches' languages and refusing to consider the New Testament churches' world is unwillingness to fully identify with the New Testament church. Hence, when we read a Scripture passage, we must be willing to adopt the meaning/s of its initial intended audience, and not necessarily what comes to our minds.

We should not reject the New Testament-era church. When we read a Scripture passage, we must be willing to adopt the meaning/s of its initial intended audience, and not necessarily what comes to our minds.

Extra-Scriptural aids to study toward this end are appropriate, because there is a distinction between

1. on one hand using aids such as ancient language resources, archaeology, history, and/or early church writings to help us understand what is written in the Scriptures and intended to be understood,
2. and on the other hand devising an entirely new innovation, seeking out Scripture texts to claim the innovation as 'implicitly a good idea,' and/or going to early church writings to say that some of our spiritual forefathers thought it was not contrary to Scripture.

It is hoped that the reader sees the difference. In the former, the aids are to help us rightly read out of the biblical text; in the latter, we would be reading into the biblical text from outside of Scripture.

The axiom of 1 Corinthians 4:6 takes its context from a number of passages. It indicates that we are not to "go beyond" what is written in Scripture. For meaning, let us first note Romans 14:1-12:

"Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but [do not] argue about opinions. [One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, 'AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.' So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God" [NASB|ICB|PEB|NASB].

There was expected to be disagreement among Christians; to expect conformity of thought on religious details is contrary to this passage.²ⁿ This passage examples what some call "Individual Soul Liberty." Christians are authorized to make some responsible decisions for themselves. James 1:25 refers to the Christian's "perfect law, the law of liberty" (ASV).

We turn to 1 Corinthians 4:6, with what is called in Greek "το μη υπερ α γεγραπται" literally

1. "el no sobre lo que está escrito" ³ = "the not over it that it-is written."
2. "the not beyond what has been written." ⁴

¹ At times, this is from laziness or desire to dismiss unfavorable evidence in arguments.

² Sadly, to push their preferences, some exploit 'weak faith' clauses to prohibit what the Bible permits, claiming that actions Scripture permits should be banned to not 'offend' the 'weaker brother.' To sustain this bondage, they then try to weaken faiths of Christians. Scripture repeatedly encourages strong faith, such as at Luke 7:9. Any efforts to stunt or damage a valued quality of Christ's servants should be opposed.

³ Lacueva, *Nuevo Testamento Interlineal Griego-Español*, page 665.

⁴ McReynolds, *Word Study Greek-English New Testament*, page 603.

Word by word: το = "the," μη = "not," υπερ = "beyond," α = "what," γεγραπται = "has been written."

This was a New Testament church maxim with a name. Greek γεγραπται here is elsewhere translated "It is written" before some of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, including Luke 4:4, and so at 1 Corinthians 4:6, Scripture is what is referred to with γεγραπται.

The 1 Corinthians 4:6 maxim was applied to this specific situation: people were claiming it was good to prefer one teacher to others – a non-biblical teaching. The maxim means we should not mandate or `encourage with maybe a little pressure¹ⁿ any tenet or practice/non-practice beyond what is explicitly stated,²ⁿ patterned, exemplified,³ⁿ or principled⁴ⁿ in New Testament-era Scripture.⁵ⁿ

The slogan "Where Scripture speaks, we speak; where Scripture is silent, we are silent" fits that; pairing it with Romans 14:1-13 "Individual Soul Liberty" can reduce strife. All that should be pressed is what is explicitly stated, principled, exemplified or patterned in Scripture; Christians are on responsible liberty accountable to God to infer from Scripture in other matters. We are not wiser than God in how Christians `need bound.' This is GOD'S jurisdiction -- not ours. God neither needs nor authorizes `little helpers' in this. Romans 14:4 has "Who are you to censure another's servant?" (NBV).

Areas where Scripture is silent and where Christians have responsible liberty accountable to God for their choices are solely in GOD's jurisdiction – not ours.

2 Timothy 3:16a reminds us Who the ultimate Author of Scripture is. This means every unit of text in Scripture comes from God. Every unit of text is what God wanted written down for us to read or to have read to us. It should be held as the highest authority in any matter that it addresses, and its precepts and sanctioned practices are backed by the wisdom, will, and authority of God Himself.

In order to more closely follow the New Testament church's Scriptures, which are "breathed out by God" (ESV) per 2 Timothy 3:16, more of us need to follow the New Testament church maxim of 1 Corinthians 4:6. To do this, no precept that is not indisputably and explicitly stated,⁶ⁿ principled, exemplified, or patterned in the New Testament church's Scripture ALONE⁷ⁿ should be stated or `encouraged with maybe a little pressure⁸ⁿ the church.

The New Testament churches' Scripture records exactly what God wanted written down. It should be held as the highest authority in any matter that it addresses. Its precepts and sanctioned practices are backed by the wisdom, will, and authority of God Himself.

¹ This includes any type of activity that would reasonably deter anyone from believing or doing differently. This includes officially or unofficially harming the person's status in the church, taking away opportunities, or raising questions about the devoutness or character of the person in disagreement. `Pressure' is not limited to these either -- it includes any negative consequence or removal of anything positive in order to address nonconformance itself or nonconformists.

² There is a difference between when a passage states something, versus when someone makes inference on the passage and applies it to another matter -- even when rightly.

³ It is important to be aware that not every recorded event and/or detail is an example.

⁴ Of course, any inference of a passage contrary to what it principles is inaccurate.

⁵ **'This passage teaches'-type statements** are NOT "what is written"/Scripture and cannot be so treated, even if right. Ideas of mortals must NOT be treated as words of God. Revelation 22:18 opposes "add unto" (ASV) Scripture; treating `This passage teaches' ideas as equal to Scripture has equal effect to adding/inserting them directly into the text.

⁶ In any disagreement, if translation of a passage is reasonably open to question in a way relevant to the disagreement, then there is no "indisputably...stated" in that case.

⁷ Jesus reproved religious leaders' "tradition of men" (ASV) meaning "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (ESV) at Mark 7:8-9 and Matthew 15:6-9. Some groups both decry this and do this. When group leaders have expected `inferences' of Scripture, and refuse to accept the possibility of mistake by predecessors on these, they do this.* These views of mortal predecessors are taught as indisputable divine truths. Regardless of the groups' terminologies, this is exactly what Jesus reproved.

*as noted by Holloway, Foster, Renewing God's People, page 12.

⁸ Described in first note on this page.

Per 1 Corinthians 4:6, if a precept or practice/non-practice is propagated by either mandate or 'maybe a little pressure'¹ⁿ, but is dependent upon

- an additional writing or discourse claimed to be a 'revelation,' or
- a Bible translation, or Bible re-wording, or Bible inference, or
- a tradition – whether called "tradition," "old path," "heritage," etc. – or
- a leadership directive either past or present,

"Scriptural" Person/Bible-based:
These mean to be centered/based on Scripture. These do NOT mean to be in agreement with what someone thinks Scripture teaches.

and cannot be unambiguously shown from the New Testament-era church's Scriptures *ALONE*, then it violates those Scriptures, which are "breathed out by God" (ESV) per 2 Timothy 3:16.

Further, any precept or practice/non-practice propagated by either mandate or 'maybe a little pressure'²ⁿ but dependent on understandings of Scripture that would not have been intended for the New Testament-era church, is also unauthorized. 2 Timothy 3:16a says "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV), so every unit of text is what God wanted written down for us to read or have read to us; its precepts and sanctioned practices are backed by the wisdom, will, and authority of God Himself. Therefore, what God communicated to the New Testament-era church and was intended to be understood is what should be followed, and only that – not understandings we would put on those texts which do not match those communicated to the New Testament church. To do so would also violate the New Testament church maxim recorded in Greek by God for posterity at 1 Corinthians 4:6.

If we would follow the principles of such passages as Romans 14:1-12 as well as the New Testament church maxim at 1 Corinthians 4:6, there would be less conflict in the church. There would

be fewer obstructing disagreements. There is room for individual opinion and room for sharing it, and if it is a matter of practice/non-practice, the Christian can make an individual decision on the Christian's

*There is room for individual opinions, and room for sharing them. However, any opinion must remain an individual matter that is not in any way binding on another.*⁵ⁿ

own individual behavior. However, when we mandate or 'encourage with maybe a little pressure'³ⁿ onto others any doctrine or practice/non-practice other than what is explicitly and *UNMISTAKABLY* stated, patterned, exemplified, or principled in Scripture,⁴ⁿ we risk conflict with other

Careless Accusations and When an Inference from Scripture is an OPINION

We should avoid carelessness in accusing people of ill motives or of 'being unfaithful to/taking liberties with' Scripture based on disagreement. Luke 3:14 has "neither accuse any one wrongfully" (ASV). 1 Peter 3:8 has "Be kind and humble" (ICB); we all need to accept that we do not know all, are not always right, and so we *ALL* have opinions and make mistakes – we should be charitable.

Scripture has "**things hard to understand**" (NASB) per 2 Peter 3:16.⁶ When one Christian suspects teachings in passages and another truly does not, then the genuinely disputed inference is not 'explicit and unmistakable' and is an *OPINION*. The same is also true of any collection/code of rules for inference. **No matter its age or how convinced** anyone is on such an inference or code, **it is still an opinion**. Opinions can be right, but wrongful accusation never is.

¹ This includes any type of activity that would reasonably deter anyone from believing or doing differently. This includes officially or unofficially harming the person's status in the church, taking away opportunities, or raising questions about the devoutness or character of the person in disagreement. 'Pressure' is not limited to these either -- it includes any negative consequence or removal of anything positive in order to address nonconformance itself or nonconformists.

² Explained in previous note.

³ Explained in first note on this page.

⁴ Also, emphasizing a valid Bible matter more than the Bible emphasizes it often causes a backlash; people become so annoyed that they denigrate the subject, rather than pay it due heed. Notable instances of this are Mary, water baptism, and the Holy Spirit. While this does not make it right, let us not tempt anyone. Let us trust God's levels of emphases in His written Word, and put Bible emphases to Bible matters.

⁵ Exception: rulings of congregation leadership truly needed for orderly congregation governance. There should be constant wariness against binding others needlessly; Luke 6:31 says "Treat others exactly as you would have them treat you" (NBV).

⁶ Pointed out in Stanley, Charles F. Stanley Life Principles Bible, page 1478.

believers who do not see such things as fitting. It is best to simply avoid these.¹ⁿ

We recall that post-apostolic times had a climate where many church leaders did whatever they wanted with little to no regard to Scripture. In trying to backtrack to the church as overseen by the Lord Jesus Christ's personal apostles, we need to use the New Testament to help us reconstruct the teachings and normal practices of that era. To do this, we need to do both the following:

1. Remember that the New Testament church used Old Testament Scripture to define itself. Romans 15:4 says "Everything that was written in the past| was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (ICB|NASB). The writings of Peter and Paul are full of Old Testament quotations. The Old Testament gives context to the New Testament.
2. Consider ALL of the New Testament. 2 Timothy 3:16a says "All Scripture is breathed out by God and | useful for..." (ESV|TNIV). We should follow the Baptist practice "compare Scripture with Scripture" by
 - a. remembering that versification did not come with Scripture²ⁿ and therefore not isolate parts of verses or verses from the longer passages that they are in, and
 - b. allowing Scripture passages to explain and be explained by other Scripture passages.

About the latter, some use New Testament passages to 'trump' passages used by people they disagree with, thereby creating apparent contradictions by setting Scripture against itself; rather, we should allow Scripture to work together to explain itself, which means we consider and use all New Testament passages to get the most comprehensive and accurate³ⁿ reconstruction possible of the New Testament congregations' teachings and practices as led by the Lord Jesus Christ's personal apostles.

It is vital to always consider Scripture's purpose; 2 Timothy 3:15b-7 describes Scripture as

"sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for|doctrine|, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness: so that the| person who serves God| may be complete, | entirely instructed for all good work."⁴

This passage assures us that we need not have concerns about unreliable Scripture, eliminates merit to speculations or disputes about unreliable versus reliable Scripture, and states Scripture's purpose. Scripture can lead people to salvation via faith in Jesus Christ, and can be used to teach truth and address wrong – but it is given "so that the person who serves God" can be "entirely instructed" to do all good deeds; this is its *purpose*.⁵ⁿ If we truly love the written Word of God, let us 2 Timothy 2:15a "Give diligence" (ASV) to fight temptation to misuse it against its purpose; we must keep to God's purpose of Scripture to be 2 Timothy 2:15b "handling aright the word of truth" (ASV).

¹ Alexander Campbell in the early 1800's wisely wrote regarding any Christian "whether he holds any of the views of the Calvinists or Arminians, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, or Quakers, is never once to be asked of such persons, in order to admission into the Christian community called the church."* God adds to the church per Acts 2:47b **"the Lord added to them day by day those |who were being saved"** (ASV|NASB). Whether a Christian with biblical faith[†] following Jesus Christ as Lord also holds any distinctive beliefs of any of these groups, or of the Orthodox, of what the Vatican decrees for Catholics, of Mormons/"Latter-Day Saints," of Seventh-day Adventists, of Messianic Jews, of Mennonites, of Brethren, of Independent Christian/Churches of Christ, of Holiness groups, of any of the Pentecostal groups Oneness or Trinitarian, or of any other Christian denomination or 'fellowship/brotherhood of churches' is not to be an issue among mortals regarding who is deemed eligible for full standing in the **LORD'**s church -- God alone is the One with authority to decide admission, and He dictated the terms: acceptance of the Gospel by biblical faith to follow Jesus Christ as Lord.[†]

*A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, page 100.

[†]Biblical faith is explained in *Part 4/The Basics of Salvation*.

² Versification was added to editions of Scripture in the 1500's.

³ Likes **AND DISLIKES** toward people have no place in Scripture inference. We must not adopt wrong inferences or refuse right inferences because of loyalty to anyone. Likewise, we must not let disdain for anyone have the same influences either.

⁴ **ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.**

⁵ Scripture was **NOT** given to thoroughly answer our every religious curiosity. God did not give us all we want to know -- He gave us all we need to know to **DO** what He wants.

A Basis for Christian Agreement -- Finale

The New Testament-era church was overseen by the Lord Jesus Christ's apostles – all of whom He commissioned Personally. Therefore, there is merit to adhering to the common practices of those congregations. Had the post-apostolic church not strayed from the ways called for by the apostles and by Scripture, disagreements would not exist to the extent that they do c. 2000.

When two people get separated accidentally, they often retrace their way back to where they were last together. A similar procedure might work well for the church. Ideally, all congregations should retrace their steps as far as possible to get as close as possible to the New Testament practices. Many do not see the merit of doing this, and even doing this would not eliminate disagreements because we would still disagree over the precise details, but it would minimize our disagreements.

The common ground for all church congregations is that they are in a succession that has existed since the New Testament era; their common root is the New Testament-era church. Much of the New Testament-era church's practices and teachings are in the New Testament church's Scriptures given by God. Some church congregations and denominations/'fellowships' are more right than others on assorted topics per this standard. Regardless of that, Ephesians 4:2 teaches that we should be "making allowances for each other's faults" (NLT 1996).

Scripture is important. At John 5:39 Jesus told a religious group opposed to Him "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me" (NASB). Old Testament Scripture was all that was extant then, but it pointed towards Jesus Christ. The same is true of the New Testament now: 2 Timothy 3:15b-7 describes Scripture as

"sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for [doctrine], for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness: so that the person who serves God may be complete, entirely instructed for all good work."¹

Both Old and New Testament²ⁿ Scripture points us to Jesus Christ, and is provided for the purpose of promoting good works.³ⁿ Even if one thinks Scriptural inerrancy only applies to some topics, we can all expect Scripture to be fully accurate in its *purpose*: promoting what is good to do. The same Scripture points us to biblical faith⁴ⁿ in Jesus Christ. Acts 11:26 reports "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB), and so to be a Christian there is a *duty to follow Jesus Christ – a duty that all true Christians agree on*.

For church congregations and individual Christians who do not wish to limit their service to the Lord Jesus Christ to their own denomination/'fellowship'/'brotherhood,' the question should be *'On the basis of what we agree on about the Scriptures, what can and should we do?'* Too many of us in the church are fixated on what we think we cannot do together, and we should change that.

Are Biblical Authority and Church Unity Mutually Exclusive? Absolutely not! Many people wrongly think they are. The truth: if Scripture is used according to its purpose , the former should lead to the latter.

A Recap and Look Back to the New Testament Era

At Matthew 16, the Lord Jesus asked His disciples Who people were saying that He is. After they answered this, the following occurred at Matthew 16:15-8

¹ ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

² The latter part of Luke 10:7 is quoted as "Scripture" at 1 Timothy 5:18.* Any comparison of their underlying Greek texts makes this quite apparent.

*Noted in Paige Patterson's article in Criswell, Believer's Study Bible, page 1843.

³ **Scripture never says it will give complete and definitive answers to every single religious curiosity** mortals come up with throughout time. Notice the part here "so that the person who serves God may be complete, entirely instructed for all good work." By means of Scripture, **God gave us** as a whole **everything we need to know, NOT** everything we **want to know**.

JUST BECAUSE SOME MORTAL THINKS A CURIOSITY OUGHT TO BE IMPORTANT DOES NOT MEAN THAT GOD EVER HAS.

⁴ Biblical faith is explained in *Part 4*.

"`But what about you?' he asked. `Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, `You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, `Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it'" (TNIV|ASV|TNIV).

It is commonly known that "Peter" is an Anglicized transliteration of one Greek word for "rock" and "rock" translates another Greek word and that this was a Greek word play.¹ⁿ "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."² Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πέτρα, which is what was said shortly before: "'You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God.'" This is the premise which Christ's one church is built on: that truth that Jesus Christ is the Christ and the Son of the living God.

Jesus Christ's church had not been instituted: "I will build my church." He instituted His church at Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB).

The word "church" translates εκκλησια. To New Testament-era Greek-reading/hearing Christians, one meaning of the word³ⁿ is this: in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁴ This parallels how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Before the time of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples"; "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB). Hence, at Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Christ was establishing His one community of followers.⁵ⁿ Per Acts 2:47, the Lord Himself is "adding to | them" (NASB|ASV) each newly-saved convert.

When Jesus Christ instituted His church, He said at Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB). In Acts 2, Peter preached its inaugural sermon. Matthew 28:19-20 shows that in making converts to Christ's church, Christ said we are to "Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NCV|NASB). Note the "I **have taught** you" – a past tense; in Christ's church, we are to focus on the things that Jesus Christ had taught *up to that time* found in the four gospels and Acts 20:35.

Per Acts 2:42, after the inaugural sermon of the church, those in it "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine | and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (NKJV|ESV). The "apostles' doctrine" kept unity in the church in the New Testament era.⁶ The "apostles' doctrine" is not a mysterious thing hidden in Scripture – following Matthew 28:19-20, it is what Christ taught.

As the church grew, portions began to meet as congregations in like manner as at Acts 2:42. Romans 16:5 and Colossians 4:15 report meetings in common homes, which shows nothing specially-sacred about any of it. Hebrews 10:24-5 tells the purpose of such assembly:

¹ We will not consider speculations about conjectured Aramaic conversations. Greek was common in Palestine, 2 Peter shows Peter knew Greek, and Jesus is God in flesh and could speak any language. Further, those speculated conversations are not written Scripture, described as "God-breathed" (ESV) in 2 Timothy 3:16.

² MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

³ For more discussion, see *Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church"*.

⁴ Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

⁵ Some people think the church or `church faithful' are those who agree with their own teachings about `how to follow Christ.' They miss Isaiah 14:12-15, spoken against Satan who thought "I will be like the Most High" (JPS 1917). 2 Peter 1:1 names "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV, ESV). In as much as any people think that status in Christ's church depends on following their teachings, they do exactly as Satan did. The sin that was the undoing of Satan has been involved in church division.

⁶ Noted by Holloway, Foster, Renewing God's People: A Concise History of Churches of Christ, page 13.

"and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, [not giving up] our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (NASB|TNIV|NASB).

The purpose of church meetings is for Christians to encourage each other to live Christian lives of love and good deeds, which are things Jesus Christ taught during His entire earthly ministry. The purpose is stated before the command to not abandon church assembly,¹ and then repeated afterward.

Acts 2:42 mentions "the apostles' doctrine" (KJV, NKJV), which is not some mysterious entity hidden in Scripture. One apostle, Paul, tells us what he called "sound doctrine" at 1 Timothy 1:3-10

"As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, | for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers| and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine" (NASB|TNIV|ESV).

Paul addressed the same subject at 1 Timothy 4:1-6

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed" (ESV).

At Titus 2:1-8a, Paul wrote

"You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned" (TNIV).

Here, "sound doctrine" and "good doctrine" referred to matters of overall living.

At Titus 1:9-12, Paul explains that a church leader should have good character so

"that he may be able to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict [those who are against the true teaching]. For there are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped; men who overthrow whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake" (ASV|CB|ASV).

Here, "sound doctrine" is opposed by people "of the circumcision," who tried to convince Christians that they were bound by the Judaic Law, affecting all areas of life. Per Galatians 5:4, they were teaching that salvation was through it. This denied the redemptive work of Jesus Christ² because He

¹ Assembly is commanded if there are Christians to assemble with. If the Bible purpose of promoting "love and good deeds" is being met to any extent by any nearby assembling group, then agreement on religious opinions or not, 'just stay home' is not an option. Any Hebrews 10:24-5 'get-together' works; this is not necessarily formal congregations.

² Bíblia de Estudo Almeida, page NT 262.

died to free us from subjection to it per Galatians 5:1. "Sound doctrine" would uphold the significance of Christ's work. John also indicated the importance of a doctrine at 2 John verses 9-11:

"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the [doctrine] of the Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds."¹

The allusion to "the doctrine of the Christ" opposes "those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" (NASB) in verse 7. Gnostics of the first two centuries disliked ideas of any divine being having a physical body; those pretending to be Christians denied that Jesus Christ is one Person in flesh.² They "denieth that Jesus is the Christ" (ASV) per 1 John 2:22.³ The "goes too far" (NASB) refers to Gnostic views that rejecting "the doctrine of the Christ"⁴ was 'gnosis/knowledge beyond' that of 'common Christians.' Rejecting that Christ had a physical body would deny a "first" truth of the Gospel per 1 Corinthians 15:3 "Christ died for our sins" (ASV).

In Scripture, "sound doctrine" and "good doctrine" and "doctrine" dangerous to reject were related to either

- a) overall living, or
 - b) proper value of Jesus Christ and His work.
- Therefore, Acts 2:42 "the apostles' doctrine" (KJV, NKJV) refers to these matters.

2 Timothy 3:15-7 calls Scripture "*sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*" and "*breathed out by God and profitable for doctrine*" in order "*that the person who serves God | may be complete, | entirely instructed | unto all good works.*"
(ESV; then ESV|KJV, NKJV; then NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruido" translated|KJV).

These should have been enough, but Paul had concern that Christians would not always focus on these things. At Romans 14:1-12, Paul expected Christians to not agree on every detail, and wrote at 14:13 "let us no longer censure one another" (NBV). Per 1 Timothy 1:3b-7a he wished Timothy to

"instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law" (NASB).

The Law was not the problem; Paul continued to follow it per James's statement to him "you follow the law of Moses in your own life" (NCV) at Acts 21:24. Jesus closes a list at Mark 7:21-3 "...pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (ASV); "pride" is exaltation of self and lack of humility. What Paul opposed was ambitious people taking focus off "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" and focusing instead on "speculation" and "fruitless discussion" hoping to inflate statures as teachers. Paul opposed such conduct repeatedly:

1 Timothy 6:3-4a "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not adhere to sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to a godly life, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in disputes"
(NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

Titus 3:8b-11 "I want you to insist on these things, so that they who have believed God may be careful to devote themselves to good deeds. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned"⁵ⁿ
(ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV).

Paul warned of "factious" people with "a morbid interest in disputes." The "foolish questionings" and "disputes" are "unprofitable" because they are irrelevant to "good deeds" and "godly life."

¹ NASB | KJV | McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 874 | NASB.

² Open Bible, page 1247.

³ Noted in Serendipity Bible: For Personal and Small Group Study, page 1710.

⁴ KJV | McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 874.

⁵ "Law" = Old Testament Jewish worship code, still approved then for Jewish-Christians.

Greek translated "factious man" is translated "heretick"¹ⁿ in the KJV. 'Heresies' transliterates Greek αἵρεσις plural for "party"²/clique and "choosing."³ This is someone so fixated on an "unprofitable" dispute that s/he seeks a religious faction/party rallied around a chosen religious opinion in that dispute. The "law" = first five books of Scripture; Paul disdained that **this behavior was even over Scripture itself**. In fact, in Paul's final letter of Scripture awaiting martyrdom, he wrote at 2 Timothy 2:23 "refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels" (NASB).⁴ⁿ

Sadly, it happened anyway; in the ensuing centuries, the church had numerous controversies over matters irrelevant to the apostles' concerns for "doctrine." Jesus closes a list at Mark 7:21-3 with "...an evil eye, railing, **pride**, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (ASV emphasis mine). "Pride" as in self-exaltation and lack of humility is "evil" per Jesus. Some people cannot bear being disagreed with, because it implies they are wrong; their pride will not allow them to accept this as an open question. Here is how far some go to squelch this: Proverbs 13:10 says "Among the proude there is euer strife" (BishB). This is because many of the proud strive against anyone who presents even a possible threat to potential perception of their 'superior rightness.' The church after the New Testament era has been racked with controversies because of speculations and arguments irrelevant to godly living, good deeds, or a proper valuing of Jesus Christ and His work.

Speculators and those involved in the strifes would drag congregations that they led into them. Congregations were intended to promote love and good deeds per Hebrews 10:24-5; many instead became used to give speculators, factionists, and lovers of strife a group of people rallied around agreement with their 'take' on speculations and their 'side' of strife - exactly what Titus 3:8b-11 quoted earlier opposed. With time, speculations continued with resultant strife, which resulted in accumulations of religious tenets and church groups estranged from each other by strife over them.

These religious speculations were religious notions and/or ideas of ceremony for individuals or for group meetings. Often without being aware of it, many people have become pride-filled over their religious speculations and/or those of their group because they thought those religious opinions exalted them over other Christians. Doctrine of regular Christian life is simple; religious speculations had more glamour and were pride-inflating, prompting many to value these more. Often, these were group matters. Many also took what were at first simple meetings of Christ's followers and inflated them to temple-like status, paralleling other religions. Combined, many have come to see Christianity as a temple⁵ⁿ ceremony-centered religion, and group religious opinions as what Christianity is about.

These religious opinions from the speculations became definers of church faith. Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts with "sexual immorality," has "idolatry" (ESV) and διχοστασια,⁶ and ends with "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV|TNIV). Greek διχοστασια is "standing apart"⁷ = acts of dividing from others. Colossians 3:5 describes "greediness, which is idolatry" (NBV); devotion to things instead of God's will of good deeds is idolatry. Therefore, when those religious speculations = things became a basis for strifes which were divisive conduct that we are commanded against, they became idols.

¹ Disjoint from church definition, Greek transliterated "heresies" in the KJV is not plural for 'disliked view' or 'religious error,' but rather simply a clique/"party."* It also means "choosing."[†] This is intentional choice, not mistake. In the church, this is making factional parties of whatever type based on chosen preference.

*A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

[†]Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

² A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

³ Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

⁴ There may be a right 'take' on some such disputes; even so, we are told to shun them.

⁵ Church-owned buildings are not 'houses of God' in the temple sense - Acts 17:24.

Christians are New Covenant temples per 1 Corinthians 3:16-7 and 6:19 -- not buildings.

⁶ Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

⁷ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

Many people have so valued their religious opinions as to make them objects of religious servitude. Such religious devotion caused them to see Christians who disagreed with those religious opinions and therefore did not share loyalty to those religious opinions as having 'unlike faith.' When religious opinions were made key definers of church faith, they were given a special religious significance. Matthew 16:15-8 reports a conversation involving Jesus Christ:

"'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it'" (TNIV|ASV|TNIV).

It is commonly known that "Peter" is an Anglicized transliteration of one Greek word for "rock" and "rock" translates another and that this was a Greek word play.¹ⁿ "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."² Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πέτρα: "'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" This is the premise upon which Christ's one church is built on: Who Jesus Christ is as the Christ and the Son of the living God. 2 Peter 1:1 names "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV, ESV). When religious opinions are made key definers of church faith, then they are given Christ's status, and thereby God's status. When these religious opinions = things have been given the place of Christ/God as objects of religious devotion and primary definers of faith, they have been made idols.

It became common to view 'church' as being defined by a sizable collection of religious tenets and a set of common assembly procedures, both of which are a result of aggressive speculations. These things came to be made causes factious and idolatrous behavior, and it became common to think that we could only have unity and be in one church if we all agree 'enough' on these things - which really only came from centuries of prohibited speculations. These problems arose from this:

1. Presumption that mortals can decide who is in the Lord's church based on if others agree 'enough' with them on how to serve Jesus Christ. This is a presumption to Christ's status for two reasons:
 - a) First, to make a Christian, the ONE Person Who must be agreed with is Jesus Christ;
 - b) Second, Acts 2:47 says of the church that the Lord Himself is "adding to them" (NASB|ASV); mortals do not decide admission into the Lord's church.
2. An errant view that the church has always had a sizable collection of distinctly-religious tenets. This has led to a view that the New Testament-era church was basically 'the first denomination' and had a commonly-held view for all the speculation-prompted disputes of the ages.

Correcting these two misconceptions can facilitate large steps toward biblical unity in the church.

We have seen that Scripture indicates that Jesus Christ's church is the collective of His followers. He adds members to it. Mortals do not determine the boundaries of that church. If a person has become a follower of Jesus Christ, then s/he has been added by the Lord Himself to the Lord's one church alongside all other Christians. People who think they can disregard this as they see fit need to reconsider Whose church it is and also reexamine what being Christ's follower entails.

Scripture does not show that the New Testament-era church was like modern denominations or similar 'fellowships/brotherhoods'³ⁿ which have sizable bodies of both expected religious tenets and expected assembly practices/non-practices. There is no indication in Scripture that there was a set uniform pattern for congregation meetings.⁴ To the contrary, Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 and 14:40 told a chaotic congregation to arrange an order and introduced guidelines for that. Had there

¹ We will not consider speculations about conjectured Aramaic conversations. Greek was common in Palestine, 2 Peter shows Peter knew Greek, and Jesus is God in flesh and could speak any language. Further, those speculated conversations are not written Scripture, described as "God-breathed" (ESV) in 2 Timothy 3:16.

² MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, page 1423.

³ Many who claim 'not a denomination' and use these or similar replacement words are actually more divisive and factious than many in self-acknowledged denominations.

⁴ Noted by Stephen J. England, quoted by Ralph G. Wilburn in his article in Blakemore, *The Renewal of Church* (ed. Osborne, *Volume 1 Renewal of Tradition*), page 1:221.

been an ordained uniform pattern that they were already supposed to be following,¹ⁿ there would have been no reason to introduce such guidelines.²ⁿ Likewise, there is also no indication in Scripture that New Testament-era church leaders had any desire for a sizable collection of agreed-on religious tenets unrelated to 1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-9 "godly life" and "good deeds" (NLT 1996).³ⁿ Titus 3:8b-9a instructs "that they who have believed God may be careful to |devote themselves to good |deeds|. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings" among other intellectual ventures called "unprofitable and vain."⁴ One of Paul's last written instructions was "refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels"⁵ⁿ (NASB) at 2 Timothy 2:23.

⇨ Thoughts on Many Age-Old Modern Disputes:

Many modern church disputes remain unresolved after centuries because the New Testament reflects neither existence of them nor commonly-held views on them – **nor an interest in answering them.** It *does* show a disdain for disputes of their kind.

Efforts at a 'sense of the New Testament-era church' on disputes of that nature which happened after the New Testament era would be compromised by incomplete information.

Furthermore, such misuses of Scripture could result in misrepresenting the New Testament-era church if they really had no commonly-held view on a particular modern issue.

¹ Per 2 Timothy 3:16-7, Scripture was written to be a "person who serves God" (ICB) 'handbook.' There is a wealth of information in New Testament Scripture about individual daily living for Christ. However, there are not enough hints to be able to sketch without human conjectures even one New Testament-era congregation's assembly proceedings in sequence from start to finish of even one meeting. This is informative. James A. Haldane wrote in 1805 that a proposal that the

"New Testament contains a complete system of regulations for Christian worship, arises from God's dealings with men in every age. We have nothing recorded, leading us to suppose, that God ever left His worshippers to their own discretion, respecting the manner of worshiping Him. In every age, His law, to His people was, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.' Their obedience to His commands was always the proof of their love. These commands not only involved their duty to men, the manner that God was to be worshipped in, what ceremonies were to be observed by them."*

While he wrongly assumed a mandated uniform congregation pattern to be gleaned, his observation is correct: **God has never been non-explicit on what He expected of worshippers.** The New Testament has plenty about our individual daily lives -- but is scant on attention to assembly proceedings. While God did legislate what was expected of Christ's followers in regular living, He did not legislate a strict congregational pattern.

Many people should concern themselves less with gleaning behind what is explicitly stated in searches for suspected implications beyond what is written, because what God did explicitly state is itself plenty challenging. Christians already have high standards to strive to every waking moment per what is explicitly stated in Scripture.

*Haldane, A View of the Social Worship and Ordinances Observed by the First Christians, page 27. The peculiar grammar is original to the quoted source.

² Evidently, congregations were normally expected to make their own orders on their own.

³ There have been many restoration movements,* such as Baptists, Mormons/Latter-day Saints, Shakers,** second century Montanists,† Sandemanian-Glasite Churches of Christ in Europe,†† the Restoration leading to the Disciples of Christ + Churches of Christ + Independent Christian churches, and some of the Anabaptists whose movement's progeny include Brethren, Mennonites and Amish. Attempts at restoration typically have focused on trying to replicate New Testament-era assemblies, more than once 'with the Bible as our only guide.' Yet despite so many distinct attempts at the same objective, they have never agreed on all conclusions. The reason: insufficient detail in Scripture for such a task. While assembly matters are of focal importance to some people, God gave them scant attention in His written Word. A focus on assembly matters did not exist when New Testament Scripture was written in the New Testament era.

* Hawkins, A Heritage in Crisis, page 138.

** C. Allen, Hughes, Discovering Our Roots, page 89.

† Foster, Will the Cycle Be Unbroken?, page 147.

†† Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, pages 38-40.

⁴ ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV.

⁵ **Using Scripture in such speculations + quarrels is against its purpose and is a mishandling of God's written Word.**

The Lord Jesus Christ's church is the Lord's, and is simply the collective of all who have become individual followers of Jesus Christ in daily life¹ⁿ – nothing more, and not one person less.²ⁿ Regardless of Christians' views on modern congregational matters, functional Christian unity can be facilitated if more Christians would be effectually mindful of the church's simple roots.

Useful Lessons of the Texts: When a disagreement over a religious detail becomes a big dispute, some group leaders 'determine where we stand on the issue' and then decide which side they are going to press the group to take. This only contributes to division. What they should do instead is follow 1 Timothy 6:3-4, Titus 3:8-11, and 2 Timothy 2:23. First, determine if the matter of dispute has any relevance to godly living or good deeds, and if not:

- reject the dispute itself as unauthorized in Scripture, not permitted by Scripture, and expressly forbidden by Scripture,
- allow it no safe haven within their jurisdiction, and
- give a 1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-11 reaction to anyone insistent upon 'fanning flames' for it.

Lesson of History: Notions that we should ponder details plus expect conformity of thought over them have had disastrous results. These have included misplaced priorities, to wasted resources, to fragmentation of the church's efforts to do what is good on behalf of Jesus Christ, to hostility up to violence. Such notions should be dismissed.

Lessons of Both: To curb division, we do not need to agree on which religious details 'need' uniformity of opinion, get and press a consensus on them, drop opinions on other matters, and preempt further similar disagreements. Changes of mind on opinions about religious details are not what is needed; changes of heart regarding reaction to disagreement on opinions about religious details are what is needed³ⁿ – we need changes of heart, not mind.

Let us all stop insisting on unity based upon opinions over matters Scripture was not given to address.

Disagreement itself is generally **NOT** the problem;

what many have done and do in reaction to disagreement is the problem.

Relevance in Scripture of Agreement to Unity

Earlier we discussed bad innovations of the post-apostolic church which are foreign to Scripture, such as prayer to entities besides God. The church is composed of followers of Jesus Christ, and we should follow His teachings by doing what is good. Notions that church unity relies on high levels of agreement over opinions on details is another bad innovation of the post-apostolic church foreign to Scripture. 1 Corinthians 4:6 records a New Testament-era church maxim: "learn to observe the precept | 'Do not go beyond what is written'" (TCNT|TNIV) – let us respond by rejecting notions that church unity relies on high levels of agreement over religious opinions on religious details.

¹ Thomas Campbell wrote in 1809 the following:

"That as it is not necessary that persons should have a particular knowledge or distinct apprehension of all divinely revealed truths in order to entitle them to a place in the church; neither should they, for this purpose, be required to make a profession more extensive than their knowledge : but that on the contrary their having a due measure of scriptural self-knowledge respecting their lost and perishing condition by nature and practice ; and of the way of salvation thro' Jesus Christ, accompanied with a profession of their faith in, and obedience to him, in all things according to his word, is all that is absolutely necessary to qualify them for admission into his church."

"Whom God hath joined together no man should dare to put asunder."*

The Lord adds all "believers" (ESV) to His ONE church per Acts 2:47/5:14. Let us not dare 'subtract' on basis of religious opinions/inferences any whom the Lord has added.

*T. Campbell, Declaration and Address, page 17.

² This is why faithful servants of Jesus Christ from all over the 'churchscape' of denominations/'fellowships'/'brotherhoods' get rich believers' blessings by the Lord; none can conclusively claim that those among its group get 'more blessed' by God.

³ James 3:17 says that the Christian's wisdom should be "pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere" (ESV). Douglas Foster notes that without Scripturally-approved dispositions, "there can be no correct belief or practice" -- Foster, Will the Cycle Be Unbroken?, page 118.

Let us be Scripturally thorough on this. The New Testament-era church was not taught to agree on religious details and yet was taught to avoid division.¹ⁿ We will be looking at both Romans 14:1-13a and Romans 16:17. Romans 14:1-13a says

"Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but [do not] argue about opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, 'AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.' So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. So let us no longer censure one another" (NASB|ICB|PEB|NASB|NBV).

Romans 14:1-13a shows that Christians were expected to not agree over religious details.²ⁿ Then, Romans 16:17 condemns *διχοστασια* translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, |contrary to| what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); *διχοστασια* is literally "standing apart."³ Christians had been taught to refrain from acts of dividing. This is in the same epistle as Romans 14:1-13a. Christians were not expected to agree on beliefs about religious details, yet were instructed to refrain from acts of dividing. It is clear from this that religious agreement and non-divisiveness were entirely unrelated.

Again, there have been numerous bad innovations of the post-apostolic church which are foreign to Scripture. Earlier in *Part 2* we discussed congregation governance and how the multiple presbyter system was replaced by systems allowing one person too much power. Another such bad innovation foreign to Scripture is to have people pray to entities other than God. The idea that church unity depends on high levels of agreement over religious details is another such bad innovation.

The church is composed of followers of Jesus Christ, and we should follow His teachings by doing what is good. Notions that church unity relies upon high levels of agreement over opinions on religious details is another bad innovation of the post-apostolic church foreign to Scripture. 1 Corinthians 4:6 records a New Testament-era church maxim: "learn to observe the precept | 'Do not go beyond what is written'" (TCNT|TNIV) - let us respond by rejecting notions that church unity relies on high levels of agreement over religious opinions on religious details.

¹ There are admonitions to congregations to have "the same mind":

1 Corinthians 1:10 says "Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be |knit together| in the same mind and in the same judgment" (ASV|BishB, GenB|ASV).

2 Corinthians 13:11 has "Be perfected; be comforted; be of the same mind; live in peace: and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (ASV).

Philippians 2:2 says "make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (ASV).

1 Peter 3:8's "of one mind" (NKJV) "harmonious" (NASB) to a region of the church means the same. Scripture will not contradict itself: "the same mind" cannot be over religious details, as Romans 14:1-13a shows Christians were not expected to agree over religious details. Church fights happen over things other than religious details; "the same mind" was simply that the church get along together.

² Hence, teaching that we should all agree on religious details is contrary to Scripture.
³ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

To Reinstate the New Testament-Era Unity

At Matthew 16, the Lord Jesus asked His disciples Who people were saying that He is. After they answered this, the following occurred at Matthew 16:15-8

"`But what about you?' he asked. `Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, `You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, `Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it'" (TNIV|ASV|TNIV).

It is commonly known that "Peter" is an Anglicized transliteration of one Greek word for "rock" and "rock" translates another Greek word and that this was a Greek word play.¹ⁿ "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."² Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πέτρα. The πέτρα was what was said shortly before: "You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God." This is the premise which Christ's one church is built on: that truth that Jesus is the Christ and Son of the living God. God begat after His own kind, so Jesus Christ is God too: 2 Peter 1:1 identifies Him "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV, ESV).

Jesus Christ's church had not been instituted: "I will build my church." He instituted His church at Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations|. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you,| and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB).

The word "church" translates εκκλησια. To New Testament-era Greek-reading/hearing Christians, one meaning of the word³ⁿ is this: in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁴ This parallels how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Before the time of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples"; "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB) and is plural for Greek meaning "one who follows one's teachings."⁵ Hence, at Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Christ was establishing His one community of followers. Per Acts 2:47, the Lord Himself is "adding to| them" (NASB|ASV) each newly-saved convert.

When Jesus Christ instituted His church, He said at Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations|. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you,| and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB). In Acts 2, Peter preached its inaugural sermon. Matthew 28:19-20 indicates that in making converts to Christ's church, Christ said we are to "Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, and| lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NCV|NASB). Note the "I **have taught** you" – a past tense; in Christ's church, we are to focus on the things that Jesus Christ had taught *up to that time* found in the four gospels and Acts 20:35.

Per Acts 2:42, after the inaugural sermon of the church, those in the church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine| and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (NKJV|ESV). The "apostles' doctrine" kept unity in the church throughout the New Testament era⁶ – and here the apostles would have been obeying what Jesus Christ had told them at Matthew 28:20a "Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" (NCV). The "apostles' doctrine" would have been Christ's teachings found in the four gospels and Acts 20:35.

¹ We will not consider speculations about conjectured Aramaic conversations. Greek was common in Palestine, 2 Peter shows Peter knew Greek, and Jesus is God in flesh and could speak any language. Further, those speculated conversations are not written Scripture, described as "God-breathed" (ESV) in 2 Timothy 3:16.

² MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

³ For more discussion, see *Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church"*.

⁴ Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

⁵ Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

⁶ Noted by Holloway, Foster, Renewing God's People: A Concise History of Churches of Christ, page 13.

As the church grew, portions began to meet as congregations in like manner as at Acts 2:42. Romans 16:5 and Colossians 4:15 report meetings in common homes, which shows that there was nothing specially-sacred about assembly. Hebrews 10:24-5 tells us the purpose of such assembly:

"and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, [not giving up] our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (NASB|TNIV|NASB).

The purpose of church meetings is for Christians to encourage each other to live Christian lives of love and good deeds,¹ⁿ which are things Jesus Christ taught during His entire earthly ministry. The purpose is stated before the command to not abandon church assembly, and then repeated afterward.

Hebrews 10:24-5 shows assembly was for the Acts 2:42 "apostles' doctrine" (KJV, NKJV). Paul gives inside information on "the apostles' doctrine" (KJV, NKJV). At 1 Timothy 1:5-10 he wrote

"But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, | for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers| and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine" (NASB|TNIV|ESV).

Here, "sound doctrine" referred to matters of ordinary living, just like what Christ's preaching was centered on. Paul's other references to doctrine were likewise. Paul was concerned that people were leaving "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" in favor of "fruitless discussion." Scripture gives more detail about what "fruitless discussion" meant:

1 Timothy 6:3-4a "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and |does not adhere to| sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to |a godly life|, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in |disputes"
(NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

Titus 3:8b-11 "I want you to insist on these things, so that they who have |believed God| may be careful to devote themselves to good |deeds|. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned"²ⁿ
(ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV).

Paul warned of "factious" people with "morbid interest in disputes." The "foolish questionings" and "disputes" are "unprofitable" because they are irrelevant to "good deeds" and "godly life." Greek translated "factious man" is translated "heretick"³ⁿ in the KJV. `Heresies' transliterates αἱρεσις plural for "party"⁴/clique and "choosing."⁵ This is someone so fixated on an "unprofitable" dispute that s/he seeks a religious faction/party rallied around a chosen religious opinion in that dispute. The "law" = first five books of Scripture; **this behavior was even over Scripture.** Paul's last letter of Scripture awaiting martyrdom urged at 2 Timothy 2:23 "refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels" (NASB). The "fruitless discussion" and "foolish questionings" refer to undue attention to matters irrelevant to good deeds or godly living.

¹ Any scorning or limit on church benevolence, or encouragement of uncharitableness to outsiders, violates this.

² `Law" = Old Testament Jewish worship code, still approved then for Jewish-Christians.

³ Disjoint from church definition, Greek transliterated "heresies" in the KJV is not plural for `disliked view' or `religious error,' but rather simply a clique/"party."* It also means "choosing."† This is intentional choice, not mistake. In the church, this is making factional parties of whatever type based on chosen preference.

*A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

†Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

⁴A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

⁵Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

Sadly, it happened anyway. Because Scriptural doctrine for overall Christian living is simple, speculations were made over religious ideas or religious ceremony. Jesus closes a list at Mark 7:21-3 with "...an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (ASV emphasis mine). "Pride" as in self-exaltation and lack of humility is "evil" per Jesus. Some people cannot bear being disagreed with, because it implies they are wrong; their pride will not allow them to accept this as an open question. Here is how far some go to squelch this: Proverbs 13:10 says "Among the proude there is euer strife" (BishB). This is because many among the proud fight vigorously against anyone who presents even a possible threat to potential perception of their 'superior rightness.' They insist upon everyone thinking toward them 'You are right.'

Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that begins with "sexual immorality," has "idolatry" (ESV) and διχοστασια,¹ and ends with "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV|TNIV). Greek διχοστασια is "standing apart"² = acts of dividing.³ⁿ

Church congregations were hijacked by religious speculators to guarantee factions rallied around their 'take' on various speculations. This was facilitated by carnal urges to divisive conduct. The religious opinions were exalted to key definers of church faith, which is the role Scripture ascribes to Christ; those religious opinions = things

'Somebody Has to Be Wrong.'

This is 100% true in disagreements, and at times, everyone is wrong. Scripture is also 100% binding at all times. Many people incorrectly think there is some 'exemption for rightness,' or that if someone is wrong, Scripture is less binding in actions regarding the error/s or the person/s.

Human beings have been very creative justifying this among themselves. Many such rationalizations are sincerely held, though wrong.

A common rationalization is that if we cannot treat people uncharitably, it would mean that we cannot say someone is wrong. A counterexample should suffice: in schools, simply marking a student's incorrect response on a test wrong is not unkindness against the student. Even if someone does not like to be told of an error, calling someone wrong is not necessarily being unkind. However, proceeding to judge and treat an innocent person as guilty of some type of character deficiency is being unkind, as is 'creative misrepresentation' for false accusation. Many people who have assumed influence in the Lord's church have indulged in treating people by standards that are rightly unacceptable even in secular schools. If unbelievers expect people to distinguish between telling someone s/he is wrong and being unkind, Christians ought to be able to tell someone s/he is wrong without acting contrary to Scripture.

Another common rationalization: 'Promoting the right religious tenets is so important that we can bend some of Scripture's rules for our overall conduct to do it.' Not only is this notion foreign to Scripture, it is contrary to what God explicitly stated is His priority. 2 Timothy 3:16-7 tells us that God gave Scripture "so that the |person who serves God| may be complete, |entirely instructed| unto all good works."* God is less concerned with what we think than with what we do. God said Hosea 6:6a "I desire loving-kindness, and not sacrifice" (NBV) which Jesus quoted at both Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. To God, distinctly-religious affairs are less important than treating people with unambiguous kindness.

SCRIPTURE IS ALWAYS BINDING REGARDLESS OF WHO IS RIGHT OR WRONG.

* NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído" translated|KJV.

Opinions and the Church

All people have opinions! Not everything we think is true is really true. This is the case in all matters, including in religion and **in study of Scripture**. People who claim of themselves 'We do not teach opinions' are stating that they think all their presented views are true facts, are ascribing to themselves infallibility, and are announcing their haughtiness and lack of humility. 1 Peter 5:5b warns that "'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (ESV). We best humbly know that sometimes we will be the ones wrong in a disagreement and not know it -- and do Luke 6:31 "Treat others exactly as you would have them treat you" (NBV) toward those who are wrong or we think are wrong.

Romans 14:1-13a shows that opinions in the church were expected to vary. Opinions themselves are not automatic problems in the church. What human beings do about their opinions or the opinions of others can be problems in the church. It is fine in Scripture to have opinions and believe they are true, and many times opinions are true -- but we still must follow Scripture in our conduct regarding opinions.

¹ Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

² Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

³ Note: to divide and to disagree are two different actions. In New Testament Scripture, the Greek expressions for these actions differ as well.

were given the place of Christ, and thereby made idols. Speculators with clout demanded that people agree with them to be deemed 'church faithful,' and in so doing, usurped a role that Scripture gives Christ. 2 Peter 1:1 names "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV, ESV); status in Christ's church is dictated by agreement with Christ, so those who have claimed that agreement with them determines status in Christ's church have shared the ungodly boast in Isaiah 14:12-5 "I will be like the Most High" (JPS 1917). To be deemed 'church faithful,' a person had to fully assent to the faction leadership's agenda, and to have 'common faith,' s/he had to share religious devotion to the faction's defining religious tenets.¹ⁿ

When Scripture became widely accessible, people rightly noted 2 Timothy 3:16a "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV) and rightly recognized it as the written Word of God. Speculators and factionists then abducted it for 'help' in their agendas. They did not use it for the purpose God gave it at 2 Timothy 3:17b "so that the | person who serves God | may be complete, | entirely instructed for all good work."² Instead, they wrongly assumed that what is important to them 'must be' important to God,³ⁿ and that God gave them Scripture for use in their own agendas. They therefore took Scripture and misused it as fodder for the same types of religious speculations and factious activities.

Bible Belief and Church Division – the Truth of the Matter:

Because fundamentalist groups are often most factious, some people think Bible belief causes division.⁵ⁿ As those who study the sciences know, association does not always mean causation.

Carnality is what causes church division. Fundamentalist groups often insist on being agreed with. Doing what Scripture says regarding reactions to disagreement would end church division.

Many added this to all these wrongs: treating their views on Scripture as Scripture itself. At Deuteronomy 4:2a, the Lord said "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you" (JPS 1917). At Revelation 22:18 we see "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book" (ASV). Many church people have treated their beliefs on what Scripture teaches as Scripture itself. They do this when they do such things as

- treat disagreement with them on Scripture inference as disregard for or insolence against Scripture,
- view/treat those who disagree with them on Scripture inference as having flaws beyond simple wrongness – such as being a weak Christian, and/or flaws of personal character like dishonesty, etc..

Whatever any person may presume, disagreement with any person over what Scripture teaches is not disagreement with Scripture. When people view/treat disagreement with their 'This passage teaches' ideas as willful disobedience against God's written Word, they are treating their 'This passage teaches' ideas as Scripture.⁴ⁿ Such activity has the same effect as adding those 'This passage teaches' ideas directly into the text of Scripture, and is in violation of such passages as Deuteronomy 4:2 and Revelation 22:18. Even worse, such behavior is treating their own teachings as God's written Word – a usurpation similar to that at Isaiah 14:12-5 "I will be like the Most High" (JPS 1917).

¹ Detail at length was in two Part 2 essays: *The Carnal Flesh* and *A Recap and Look Back to the New Testament Era*. Such practice has been passed on with purer motives.

² ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

³ What mortals think is important does not automatically mean God deems it important. Also, 'serving' God in ways He expressly prohibited **NEITHER** serves Him nor honors Him.

⁴ It is important to note that this treats Scripture as insufficient. 2 Timothy 3:16-7 tells us Scripture is given so that the Lord's servant can be ἀπτός "perfectly fit"* "entirely suited; complete."** What God wrote as Scripture by the end of the New Testament era is enough; 'expected' or 'pressured' inference is not needed.

* Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 76.

** In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 54.

⁵ We note a counter-illustration. The Orthodox Presbyterians formed due to efforts by Presbyterian Church U.S.A. liberal leadership to impede biblical conservatives' activity.* To serve the Lord biblically, the Orthodox Presbyterians had to split off.

* Longfield, The Presbyterian Controversy, pages 209-12 and 237.

Due to such activities over the centuries, it has become widely assumed that unity depends on agreement over religious viewpoints and religious ceremony. Many who have wished to restore the ancient church's unity have sought to use Scripture to infer the New Testament-era church's 'side' on modern disputes, and reconstruct 'the original congregational assembly pattern.' It has been hoped that doing these two things, plus dropping extrabiblical practices not contrary to Scripture, would eliminate church division.¹ⁿ It has even been insisted that not doing these three things promotes church division. Unfortunately, this is all the wrong direction: religious agreement was neither extant nor expected in the New Testament-era church, nor was there a uniform congregation pattern.

Romans 14:1-13a lists differences in religious thought that existed in the New Testament-era church; 14:1 has "do not | argue about opinions" (ICB|PEB) and 14:13a closes "So let us no longer censure one another" (NBV). Also, there is no indication in Scripture that a set uniform pattern for congregation meetings existed.² To the contrary, Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 and 14:40 told a chaotic congregation to arrange an order and introduced guidelines.³ⁿ Had there been a set uniform pattern, there would have been no need for that. Likewise, there is also no hint in Scripture that good New Testament-era church leaders wanted a sizable collection of agreed-on religious tenets unrelated to 1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-9 "godly life" and "good deeds" (NLT 1996). Paul in Titus 3:8-9 instructs "that they who have believed God may be careful to | devote themselves to good | deeds |. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings" and other intellectual ventures called "unprofitable and vain."⁴ One of Paul's last written instructions was 2 Timothy 2:23 "refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels" (NASB).

Christ's church was not established to preach itself to the world, nor to speculate on what the Lord would want from us without explicitly saying so. 2 Timothy 3:15b-7 describes Scripture as:

"sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for [doctrine], for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness: so that the | person who serves God | may be complete, | entirely instructed for all good work."⁵

Scripture is able to lead people to salvation by faith in Christ Jesus, and good for teaching doctrine, for addressing what is wrong, and for instructing in

What This Does NOT Say:

'...so that the people who serve God may have every religious curiosity of theirs fulfilled.'
'... so that the people who serve God can win self-exalting strife-disputes over religious opinions.'
'...so that people who serve God might have an opportunity to figure out what He wants besides what is written, and behind what is not written.'

¹ There have been many restoration movements, * such as Baptists, Mormons/Latter-day Saints, Shakers, ** second century Montanists, † Sandemanian-Glasite Churches of Christ in Europe, †† the Restoration leading to the Disciples of Christ + Churches of Christ + Independent Christian churches, and some of the Anabaptists whose movement's progeny include Brethren, Mennonites and Amish. Attempts at restoration have typically focused on trying to replicate New Testament-era assemblies, more than once with 'the Bible as our only guide.' Yet despite so many distinct attempts at the same objective, they have never agreed on all conclusions. The reason: insufficient detail from Scripture. Many people assume that affairs of church assembly are of utmost importance, but such focus on affairs of church assembly did not exist when New Testament Scripture was written in the New Testament era. Inter-congregation agreement on religious opinion and procedure is not a basis for unity urged in Scripture. **Seeking unity on bases foreign to Scripture cannot lead to Scriptural unity.**

* Hawkins, A Heritage in Crisis, page 138.

** C. Allen, Hughes, Discovering Our Roots, page 89.

† Foster, Will the Cycle Be Unbroken?, page 147.

†† Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, pages 38-40.

² Noted by Stephen J. England, quoted by Ralph G. Wilburn in his article in Blakemore, The Renewal of Church (ed. Osborne, Volume 1 Renewal of Tradition), page 1:221.

³ Evidently, congregations were normally expected to make their own orders on their own.

⁴ ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV.

⁵ ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

upright living. However, it is given "so that the person who serves God" can be "entirely instructed" to do "all good work." Scripture urges at Titus 3:8 "that they who have believed God may be careful to |devote themselves to good |deeds" (ASV|ESV|RSV 1952, NLT 1996). What is stated in Scripture is sufficient for us to know what is important to the Lord¹ⁿ and what He wants us to do. What is stated in Scripture is sufficient for us to concern ourselves with to serve Him.

The truth is that Christ established ONE church of ALL His followers.²ⁿ Its purpose: to follow Christ's teachings and preach Him to the world. At Matthew 16, the Lord Jesus asked His disciples Who people were saying that He is. After they answered this, Matthew 16:15-8 narrates:

"`But what about you?' he asked. `Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, `You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, `Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it'" (TNIV|ASV|TNIV).

It is commonly known that "Peter" is an Anglicized transliteration of one Greek word for "rock" and "rock" translates another Greek word and that this was a Greek word play.³ⁿ "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."⁴ In Greek lexicons they have separate entries. Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πέτρα. The πέτρα was what was said shortly before: "You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God." This is the premise which Christ's one church is built on: that truth that Jesus Christ is the Christ and the Son of the living God. The word "church" translates εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁵ This parallels how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Before the time of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples"; "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB). Hence, at Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Christ was establishing His one community of followers with "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations|. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB).

1 Timothy 6:3-4 has "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and |does not adhere to| sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to |a godly life|, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in |disputes."⁶ Greek translated "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."⁷ The problem with the disapproved teaching is merely that it does not stick to these subjects. Even if there is no inaccuracy or contradiction, if a group or individual focuses priority onto teaching things unrelated to godly living, or alien to what Christ ever spoke any "words" about, such activity is disapproved of.

Unfortunately, the church in centuries past has turned too much of its focus off Christ and

¹ `We want this taught in the whole church' is often accompanied with speculation `I think the Lord would want us to teach this.' Such speculation is not fitting, because God has been clear on what He wants Christ's followers to teach and to do. **God's written Word tells us what He deems important, and everything we need to know about those matters.**

² Hence, there is no need for denomination merges if just for the `one body' principle. High-profile `union talks' if just for that principle are also unnecessary. We simply need to put into cooperative action the unity we have in Christ's one church.

³ We will not consider speculations about conjectured Aramaic conversations. Greek was common in Palestine, 2 Peter shows Peter knew Greek, and Jesus is God in flesh and could speak any language. Further, those speculated conversations are not written Scripture, described as "God-breathed" (ESV) in 2 Timothy 3:16.

⁴ MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

⁵ Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

⁶ NASB|NBV|NASB|RSV 1952, NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV.

⁷ in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

onto itself or parts of itself. As influencers speculated, and built factions around agreement with their speculations, a common result was various factions promoting¹ⁿ themselves by teaching and debate.²ⁿ Often, this has been a main priority of various factious denominations/'fellowships/'brotherhoods.'

¹ Christ said at Matthew 28:19 "Go, therefore, and make disciples" (NBV). What is sad is that some seek to obstruct, discredit, reduce, and/or destroy evangelism ministries of those who do not agree with them. Those guilty may not realize the implication, but this shows that they would have Christ's will in evangelism be impeded, rather than have converts to Christ made who would not be taught to agree with them.

² A sad extreme is that some people actually make themselves a focus of salvation messages. We will note a sample from within the Churches of Christ, which in reality is a mix of real church congregations and counterfeit church-related groups. This has nothing to do with distinctly-religious tenets, which are similar for both types:

- 1) many assembling groups within the Churches of Christ meet mainly to follow Christ's teachings as Christians, and are therefore church congregations;
- 2) many assembling groups within the Churches of Christ are assembled mainly to promote their religious group interests -- most of their main influencers care little-to-nothing for following Christ's teachings in comparison, would disregard the latter for the former, and would encourage others in the same.

There are Christians among the latter groups, but Matthew 18:20 "two or three are gathered in my name" (ESV) does not apply because "name" in ancient times summed up the whole person.* The latter groups are not church congregations because they do not meet for what Christ's Name is about. To identify which type a given Church of Christ really belongs to is not done quickly; it takes time and observation.

In our sample, "denominational" means 'pertaining to a church group outside what we approve of and accept in full fellowship.' 'Type 2' "Churches of Christ" often do not accept each other or 'Type 1' Churches of Christ. The sample is from Why I Am a Member of the Church of Christ. Chapter title: "BECAUSE SALVATION IS IN CHRIST'S CHURCH." Opening: "MOST denominational preachers say that man does not have to be a member of the church to be saved. If they mean denominations, the institutions of which they are members, they are right. If they mean the church purchased by the blood, they are wrong." A paragraph later: "Any church which is not essential to man's salvation is not Christ's church, because membership in his church is indispensable to salvation. This is the twenty-fifth reason that is submitted to you for being a member of the church of Christ."**

This opened the 25th and final chapter of this book. 22 out of the 25 chapters had titles began "Because It..." One exception is "Because Christ is the Founder of Only One Church -- His Church" which just uses Christ as a tool of 'evangelism' to them. The other exceptions are "Because of Its..." and the closing chapter "Because Salvation is in Christ's Church."^^ The book author's group-centered narcissism can hardly be understated. While this is an extreme case rejected by many in the Churches of Christ, similar thought exists in and out of the Churches of Christ.

There is simply no place among mortals for them to make evangelism as much about themselves as about Christ, nor is there place for mortals to make evangelism more about themselves than about Christ. **For a person to be a Christian, the ONE Person s/he must agree with is Jesus Christ.** To be a Christian, s/he needs not agree with anyone else about how to serve Christ. Christ said at Matthew 28:19 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations" (NBV). Greek μαθητας rendered "disciples" is plural for a word meaning "one who follows one's teachings"^^ and Acts 11:26 has "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Christians are those who agree with Christ's teachings, and to be Christians, that is sufficient. Those who think someone must concord with them for salvation presume for themselves Christ's status.

We should note: **not once in Scripture do we see the likes of 'Christ and His church' or 'the Lord's church' being subjects of evangelistic discourse -- in all those evangelistic discourses, we only see people urged to come to the Lord.** In Scripture's pattern, it is no other way. For mortals to make evangelism as much or more about themselves is a presumptuous claim to Christ's status.

* in Barker, NASB Study Bible, page 1519.

** Brownlow, Why I Am a Member of the Church of Christ, page 186.

^^ Brownlow, Why I Am a Member of the Church of Christ, pages 5-6.

^^ Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

Therefore, many have come to assume wrongly that the church should mainly be a teaching and debating institution,¹ⁿ with any benevolence being limited and/or of lesser importance. This is entirely wrong per Hebrews 10:24-5²ⁿ; benevolence is the very purpose of congregations in Scripture.

The church's task is simple: we are to follow Christ's teachings in overall life, and also make Him more disciples who will do the same. The church should be doing good deeds³ⁿ and evangelism.

The Mennonites are a continuation of the Anabaptists, who commonly tried to replicate New Testament-era practice.⁴ⁿ In the 1900's, Mennonites were much less affected by modernism⁵ⁿ than by fundamentalism⁶ and tended to the latter,⁷ while Mennonite organizations worldwide stay active in benevolence.⁸ They are a harmonious denomination despite varying worship practices worldwide⁹ – an example to the rest of the church.¹⁰ⁿ In another part of the Lord's church, John Wesley, whose legacy includes the Wesleyan, Nazarene, Methodist and Holiness denominations,¹¹ⁿ wanted the

¹ Debating disagreement is not forbidden, but **Scripture limits how far to take it**. We need not say 'Everyone is right' and we can say 'They are wrong,' but **Scripture is still binding in responses to wrongness**. To 'bend' God's written Word in dispute actions shows neither devotion nor conviction. To the contrary, it suggests s/he thinks 'the Lord's work' is not worth doing to His standards, and that s/he doubts His standards are always best.

To go beyond 'bending' to knowingly and obstinately disregarding God's written Word in dispute activity is to show oneself a likely unbeliever -- Matthew 7:20-3.

² This passage shows that for congregations, to devalue benevolence is to reduce or forfeit legitimacy to exist. **'Worship clubs' which devalue benevolence** do not merit presence, time, or support by any servant of Christ; they **would do better to disband**.

³ This does **NOT** mean 'forgivingly' helping those guilty of heinous crimes escape, which is being accomplices and obstructing justice. This also does **NOT** mean worldly actions and/or civil irresponsibility in activism over secular socio-political controversies. 1 Peter 4:15 says not to be accusable as "a criminal or as a |troublesome meddler" (NBV|NASB). Christians are expected to be followers of Christ, so such conduct can be projected onto Christ by unbelievers. We best not make this happen improperly.

Christ never told his church to be political. In Scripture, we do not see the church meddling in politics -- even for laws favoring the Lord's expressed teachings.

1 Timothy 1:10 condemns "slave traders" (TNIV). Slavery is evil, but it was an accepted part of Roman society. 1 Timothy 6:1 told slaves then to obey their masters so "that the name of God and the doctrine be not blasphemed" (ASV). Slavery is a grievous earthly injustice, but it was more important that the Lord not be blasphemed.

Romans 13:1-7 tells us to obey civil law. The only exception in Scripture is Acts 4:18-31, where Christians continued evangelism despite authorities' objections. At Matthew 17:24-7, even though Christ knew He had reason to not pay a tax, He paid it "not to give offense to" (ESV) the authorities. His followers should do similar.

People who profess to follow Jesus Christ should not dare think that they can disregard civil responsibility when their opinion says they have just cause. To genuinely serve the Lord, it has to be done according to His judgments -- not ours.

⁴ A similar Anabaptist legacy is the Brethren. Brethren groups began cooperation with non-Brethren Christian groups in the 1900's -- Bowman, Brethren Society, pages 361-2.

⁵ Another term used to describe the same thing is "theological liberalism."

⁶ In Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History, page 415-6.

⁷ In S. Ferguson, Wright, New Dictionary of Theology, page 420.

⁸ In Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History, page 419-20, 431.

⁹ Loewen et al, Through Fire & Water: An Overview of Mennonite History, page 328.

¹⁰ If harmony despite widely-differing worship practices can happen in one denomination, it can happen in the entire church -- **and it should happen in the entire church**.

¹¹ He himself continued to see himself as an Anglican preacher.* A group he started was called "Methodists" by outsiders and his attempts to preach in Anglican buildings were not infrequently barred.^* Hostility from non-Methodists among the Anglican denomination eventually drove the Methodists to be a separate denomination.^†

* González, The Story of Christianity, page 2:213.

** R. Olson, The Story of Christian Theology, page 510-1.

^† Lane, Exploring Christian Thought, page 169.

American part of the movement "simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church."¹ John Wesley's living quarters were a congregation building, plus a school for poor children, a shelter for orphans and other unfortunates, a free medical facility for the needy, and a place where Christians could deposit money to go to poverty-stricken families.² At the same time, J. Wesley was a traveling preacher.³ He rode on horseback 5000 miles per year consistently for years⁴ while preaching several times a day until age 70.⁵ Efforts to 'go back to the Bible' should lead the church to make good deeds a priority and to make preaching for converts to Christ a priority. 'Going back to the Bible' should show that not only are these not mutually exclusive, they cannot be rightly separated. Matthew 5:16 says "Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (ASV); we should be doing good deeds to make the Lord good to people.

At a camp meeting at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists got together and preached.⁶ Military personnel estimated 20,000-30,000 attendees.⁷ As many as five preachers preached simultaneously in various sites on the meeting grounds, and this meeting and others like it were reported to have changed the moral character of Kentucky and Tennessee.⁸ This and similar revivals in the pre-1861 United States prompted a spirit of unity.⁹ When Christian groups work together to urge people to live godly lives for Christ, as He ordained at Matthew 28:19-20,¹⁰ⁿ it unites those church groups because they are doing their appointed and right common task.

What is needed to restore the ancient New Testament-era church unity is not agreement over religious details, nor near-duplicate religious ceremony at separate meetings. Romans 14:1-13a shows that Christians are not expected to agree over religious details.¹¹ⁿ In Scripture, unity is unconnected with agreement over opinions on religious details. We see that *seeking an enforced consensus over opinions on religious details is NOT the Bible way to seek church unity.*

¹ Outler, et al, The Wesleyan Theological Heritage, page 149.

² Keysor, Our Methodist Heritage, page 24.

³ Keysor, Our Methodist Heritage, page 25.

⁴ Lane, Exploring Christian Thought, page 169.

⁵ González, The Story of Christianity, page 2:214.

⁶ Dieter, The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century, page 204.

⁷ B. W. Stone, Rogers, The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself, with..., page 37.

⁸ Vos, Exploring Church History, page 135.

⁹ Dieter, The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century, page 204.

¹⁰ It is not right for factious church groups to hope for revival 'at their place' when they are unwilling to have the Lord's stated priorities be their priorities. Often, the desire is for the growth of the faction, and/or faction 'bragging rights.' When such hopes for 'revival' are made prayer, the factionists "ask amiss" (ASV) -- James 4:1-3. The Lord's priorities need to be their priorities.

¹¹ The view 'If everyone would just agree with us about the truth, we could have unity' discords with Scripture. 1 Corinthians 4:6 quoted in the footer forbids mandating religious thought beyond what Scripture says, so that easy way out of temptation to factionism is disallowed. Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that begins "sexual immorality" (ESV), has διχοστασια, and ends "drunkenness|, orgies" (ASV|TNIV). Romans 16:17 condemns διχοστασια translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, |contrary to| what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); διχοστασια is literally "standing apart."* Christians were taught not to engage in acts of dividing. Romans 14:1-13a shows that Christians were not expected to agree on opinions over religious details, yet Romans 16:17 reports that Christians were taught to refrain from acts of dividing. We see that we are expected to refrain from division even amidst disagreement over religious details.

Church persons asserting essentially 'We could have unity if everyone would just think and do what we approve of' simply mean that they will indulge in acts of dividing until others make it so they no longer need to resist temptation. In Scripture, we are expected to take responsibility to resist our own carnal urges.

* Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

What is needed to restore the ancient New Testament-era church unity is for many church groups to stop giving their distinctive religious tenets religious devotion and the status of Christ as key definers of faith. In other words, they need to `de-idolize' their distinctive religious tenets. Also, many church people need to accept that Christ's church exists for Christ's teachings, and therefore stop trying to press their own teachings onto His church. In addition, what is needed is for church people to set aside carnal urges to: be divisive/factious, engage in strife,¹ⁿ and/or exalt themselves. What is needed is for Christians to restore the church's New Testament-era priorities. What is needed is for Christ's followers to refocus on our appointed duties as a church, and make those our shared priorities in individual *and congregational* life.

If church groups would simply put first what Christ preached, church unity can be facilitated. When it comes to the priorities of our teachings, we would all be preaching the same things: what was spoken by Jesus Christ. When it comes to the priorities of what we do, we would all be sharing the same tasks: doing good deeds just as He taught, and making more followers of Him just like He told us to do. Then, the church's ancient unity would be restored. ■

¹ One of the most egregious results of misuse of church congregations is that it led to factions and counterfeit church groups that teach personal disdain of others. Many people wrongly think `faith' and `Christian conviction' are shown by whom they disdain personally, by how much, and by how vigorously they express it. While this is very easy because our flesh loves strife, it is against what Scripture teaches.

Now, many people say that they care about the people, `We just harshly oppose their errors.' However, their actions in regard to the people show they have at least mainly unkind sentiments toward those who hold despised group tenets. Their actions regarding the people show anything but kind sentiments.

A man told Jesus at Luke 10:27 that he thought a person should obey "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 neighbor as thyself" (ASV). At Luke 10:28, Jesus said "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live" (ASV). At Luke 10:29, this person was seeking the `low road' and asked "And who is my neighbor?" (ASV) hoping for exceptions. Jesus told the famous Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-5, where a man was left for dead by robbers, and three people -- two people of esteemed social classes, and one of a despised ethnic group -- had an opportunity to help the man. The former two went as far as they easily could from it. The third person, of the much-despised Samaritans, generously assisted the man. Jesus said at Luke 10:36 "Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbor unto him that fell among the robbers?" (ASV), then Luke 10:37 reports "'The one who showed him mercy.' And Jesus said to him, `You go, and do likewise'" (ESV). The person seeking the `low road' was forced to acknowledge that the Samaritan was a "neighbor." This would have meant to the hearer that there are no exceptions to who is a "neighbor." The `low road' is not an option for any of Christ's followers -- there are no exceptions to "love the Lord thy God...and thy neighbor as thyself" (ASV).

Hebrews 10:24-5 gives the divinely-appointed purpose for church congregations: "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, |not giving up| our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (NASB|TNIV|NASB).

The divinely-appointed purpose for church congregations: "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" and to be "encouraging one another." It is bad enough when congregations and church-related groups downgrade the importance of the divinely-appointed purpose for church congregations. It is worse if they neglect their divinely-appointed purpose. It is even worse when congregations and church-related groups work against their divinely-appointed purpose.

`Faith' and `Christian conviction' are shown by following Christ's teachings in all settings. `Faith' and `Christian conviction' should be shown by meaningfully agreeing that what Christ preached and what He told His followers to do should be our priorities.